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Romantic writers and mass education

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**'Hands full of employment, and a head not above it': Romantic
writers and mass education**

Joseph Hutcheon

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the
requirements for award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of
Arts, School of Humanities, December 2018

77,344 words

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to examine the educational experiences, theories and influence of four key writers in the Romantic era (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hazlitt and De Quincey).

I begin by outlining the main developments in contemporary educational theories from the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth centuries, and explore the impact of these developments on the educational ideas of the relevant writers. I look in particular at the educational writings of Francis Bacon, John Milton, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Catherine Macaulay Graham, Mary Wollstonecraft, Maria Edgeworth, and Hannah More. I consider some key controversies that arose during this period, such as home versus school tuition, the appropriate education for girls, and children's reading of fairy and ghost stories. In this chapter I also look at the growth of the Dissenting Academies, which attempted to put some of the more progressive ideas on education into practice, and at the rival 'monitorial' systems of Andrew Bell and Joseph Lancaster.

In the chapters on individual writers, I look at their own educational experiences, the theories they developed on education, and the type of education they chose for their own children. I also consider how, for these writers, educational theory and practice coincided or differed, and to what extent their reputations as 'radicals' or 'conservatives' are mirrored in their ideas about education.

In the final chapter I examine the 'afterlives' of these writers in education, in particular their influence on Victorian educational reformers, focusing on John Stuart Mill and Matthew Arnold. I look at the development of private and commercial academies, which to some extent replaced the Dissenting Academies as an alternative to grammar and public schools. This chapter also covers the controversy around 'payment by results', which divided Mill and Arnold.

This dissertation is dedicated to Caroline, Rebecca and Sophie.

I am grateful to my joint supervisors, Dr Stephen Cheeke and Professor Ralph Pite, for their support throughout my research. Professor Andrew Bennett and Dr Ros Powell provided helpful advice during my upgrade from MPhil to PhD.

I also thank the staff of the Arts and Social Sciences Library at the University of Bristol, and the staff of the London Library.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Caroline Hutcheon, for all her support during my studies, and for her painstaking proof reading of this dissertation.

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: Joseph Hutcheon DATE: 19 December 2018.

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Introduction

This thesis explores the reaction of four key writers in the Romantic era (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hazlitt and De Quincey) to educational reforms, actual and proposed, in the light of their own educational experiences and theories. It looks at the influence of these writers in their lifetimes and the educational choices they made for their own children. The thesis also considers the changing perceptions of the role of literature in education during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and concludes with an examination of the 'afterlives' of Wordsworth and Coleridge in Victorian debates on education.

The key questions I seek to answer are, firstly, to what extent were these writers' ideas about education influenced by their own educational experiences, compared to their reaction to contemporary theories? Secondly, putting theory into practice, what choices did they make in their own children's education? Thirdly, what influence did these writers have on educational practices, both in their own lifetimes and in future decades? Finally, what role, if any, did they see for literature in education?

All writers on educational reform, then and now, face two underlying fundamental questions: what is education, and what is its purpose? Is education something to be undertaken for its own sake, or should there always be a vocational purpose behind it?¹ Particularly after the French Revolution, some conservative writers began to identify a link between the advocacy of 'useful', particularly

¹ The debate about the purpose of education is at least as old as Plato's *The Republic*. See Anthony O'Hear, 'History of the philosophy of education' in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. by Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 213-216.

scientific education and political radicalism, also linking Utilitarianism with Godlessness. I explore the discussions around this concept of 'utility' in education, which was perhaps the single most divisive issue, separating as it did not only radical from conservative writers, but also placing writers with otherwise broadly similar views on opposite sides of the question.

Although many writers on educational reform, particularly in the eighteenth century, were women, this thesis focuses mainly on the education of boys. Until almost the end of the nineteenth century, the vast majority of girls from upper- and middle-class families were educated at home. This was partly a class issue; upper-class girls were educated at home to avoid them making unsuitable friendships with girls from lower social classes.² In her memoir of her childhood in Cambridge in the late 1890s, Gwen Raverat, sent to boarding school at her own request because she was bored at home, writes of an aristocratic acquaintance telling her mother snubbingly 'We do not send our daughters away to school.'³ Overwhelmingly, for girls of all social classes, the only purpose of education was to prepare them for marriage and parenthood, and so discussions about, for example, the design of the curriculum would be seen as irrelevant. Even though conservative writers such as Hannah More protested about the narrow range of 'accomplishments' provided by girls' private schools, her solution was to teach them useful skills at home and

² Of the major girls' public schools, Cheltenham Ladies' College was founded in 1854, Roedean School in 1884, St Paul's Girls' School in 1904, and Benenden as late as 1923. Although Christ's Hospital School was intended from its foundation in 1552 to teach both boys and girls, the girls' school was always much smaller than the boys' school, and until the late nineteenth century girls were taught only the most basic literacy and numeracy, as well as needlework and other 'useful' subjects. Becky Sharp in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848) can be seen as an exemplar of an 'unsuitable' school friend.

³ Gwen Raverat, *Period Piece: A Cambridge Childhood*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1952), p. 61.

encourage serious reading, rather than to provide them with a formal academic education.

The thesis considers debates around education in England and Wales only. Scotland had developed a different, and some would argue, superior system of education during the early eighteenth century, and many of the issues and controversies I examine were irrelevant to Scotland. As discussed in Chapters two and four, both Wordsworth and Hazlitt refer to the Scottish system in passing, only to dismiss it as an unsuitable model for England.

As well as looking at general trends, I examine in detail two specific controversies. Firstly, I discuss the support of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey for the 'monitorial' system of teaching developed by Dr Andrew Bell, and their opposition to the rival system of Joseph Lancaster. Secondly, I consider the later debate about 'payment by results', which caused a major disagreement between John Stuart Mill and Matthew Arnold, who agreed on many points relating to education.

Methodology and sources

The methodology I have chosen is biographical, relying as far as possible on primary prose material such as letters and notebooks. The advantage of this approach is that it focuses on the writers' own words, free from the interpretations placed on those words by (often partisan) biographers and critics. A possible drawback is that my methodology could be seen as too far removed from literary criticism, but I believe my approach enables me to identify subtle differences in the development of ideas of writers who are frequently grouped together (particularly Wordsworth and Coleridge) and to trace mutual influences between writers. I hope

that my work will help inform future scholarship on, for example, the theme of education and childhood in Wordsworth's poetry.

As well as Wordsworth and Coleridge, I discuss in detail the educational background and writings on education of William Hazlitt and Thomas De Quincey, which have received comparatively little scholarly attention. The choice of these two authors was made for two reasons. Firstly, their educational experiences provide useful insight into teaching practices towards the end of the eighteenth century at two very different types of school; Hazlitt at a small Dissenting Academy in London and De Quincey at a large, long-established provincial grammar school which had to some extent adopted progressive methods of teaching. Secondly, Hazlitt and De Quincey provide perspective on some key contemporary controversies around education (for example on the desirability of State-funded education), and their writings illustrate the unreliability of terms such as 'radical', 'progressive' and 'conservative' in this context. For example, Hazlitt is mostly considered as a lifelong radical, in contrast to the increasingly reactionary Wordsworth and Coleridge. I argue that this is a simplistic view, and identify ways in which Hazlitt's ideas, for example on the education of women, were equally reactionary. De Quincey, by contrast, is seen as an arch-conservative, but some of his ideas, such as eliminating all forms of corporal punishment in schools and devolving many aspects of school administration to pupils, were comparatively progressive.

In terms of secondary material, I have mainly drawn upon biographies of the writers I discuss. As mentioned above, a possible problem with this is that biographers are often, though not invariably, partisan. For example, Duncan Wu's biography *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man* (2006), gives Hazlitt the benefit of the doubt in all of the many controversies in which Hazlitt was involved, and is

correspondingly condemnatory of Coleridge, whilst Richard Holmes's two-volume biography of Coleridge (*Coleridge: Early Visions*, *Coleridge: Darker Reflections*, 1998 and 1999) equally consistently portrays Hazlitt as the wrong-doer and Coleridge as the victim.⁴ To counter this, I have looked at as many different biographies as possible of each writer to arrive at a balanced view, always checking against primary sources to ensure that judgements are not based on selective quotations or biased reporting of disputes.

The key critical work covering the broad subject and timescale of the thesis is Alan Richardson's *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780–1832* (1994).⁵ Whilst acknowledging the depth and richness of Richardson's study I challenge his conclusions in several areas. In particular, I believe that Richardson blurs the subtle differences between Wordsworth's and Coleridge's ideas about education, in the process over-simplifying their motives for supporting the monitorial approach of Andrew Bell. Richardson sees their support as arising mainly from their concerns about the radicalizing effect of the education on the lower classes, especially if such education was not under the control of the Church of England. He sees the Madras system as an authoritarian, top-down approach to education, making only a passing reference to Wordsworth's attempts to have his two sons educated under Bell's system, and ignoring the use of Bell's system in major public schools. This overly narrow approach is echoed in later critical studies, such as Tom Duggett's *Gothic Romanticism: Architecture, Politics, and Literary Form*

⁴ Duncan Wu, *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London: HarperCollins, 1998); *Coleridge: Darker Reflections* (London: HarperCollins, 1999).

⁵ Alan Richardson *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

(2010).⁶ By examining in some detail the educational experiences and ideas on education of Wordsworth and Coleridge, I hope to provide an alternative perspective on their sometimes differing motivations for advocating Bell's system.

Moreover, whilst Richardson wisely cautions against 'imposing retrospectively a modern view of education on to writers with entirely different value systems', he himself does not always avoid this danger. This is particularly clear in his reactions to female writers on education in the eighteenth century. Richardson criticizes the tendency to group together radical writers on education such as Mary Wollstonecraft and conservative writers such as Hannah More as proto-feminists, stressing More's insistence on women's self-restraint. In his words 'although the two have been juxtaposed as twin expressions of "female domestic heroism" [...] to collapse their positions on female education together [...] is to do justice to the thought of neither.'⁷ However, he overlooks the fact that Wollstonecraft also argued for self-restraint and, like More, recommended reading as a means of strengthening women's minds, enabling 'nobler passions and motives [to] govern their appetites and sentiment.'⁸

Against Richardson's view of Hannah More as repressively anti-women, Anne Stott's *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (2003) seeks to re-position More as an early feminist writer and an inspiration to contemporary and later women writers.⁹ Mary

⁶ Tom Duggett, *Gothic Romanticism: Architecture, Politics, and Literary Form* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). In Duggett's words 'I will be arguing that the decisive factor in the Lake Poets' support for Madras was indeed the system's political and religious tendency', Duggett, p. 146.

⁷ Richardson, p. 181.

⁸ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*, ed. by Janet M. Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 87.

Hilton's *Women and the shaping of the nation's young: education and public doctrine in Britain, 1750-1850* (2007) takes a broader view of the role of women in education, reviewing the work of female writers on education in England from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁰ Hilton focuses in particular on the various, often subtle differences in these writers' religious views, within and beyond the Church of England, ranging from the Evangelical approach of Hannah More to the later, more liberal 'Broad Church' ideas of Mary Carpenter, and traces how these views influenced their approach to educational reforms. Hilton's work provides a useful corrective to Richardson's sometimes simplistic conclusions about women writers on education, but her work focuses on, and I believe sometimes exaggerates, the influence of such writers' religious beliefs on their ideas.

Background

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw a rapid development of educational theories in Britain and mainland Europe, in line with the spread of Enlightenment ideas, and in response to the nascent Industrial Revolution. Influential writers such as Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus pointed out the advantages to society as a whole of an educated population. As Adam Smith put it: 'The State derives no inconsiderable benefit from the education [of the lower classes]. The more they are taught, the less liable they are to the delusions of enthusiasm and superstition. [...] An instructed and educated people, besides, are

⁹ Anne Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁰ Mary Hilton, *Women and the shaping of the nation's young: education and public doctrine in Britain, 1750-1850* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

always more decent and orderly than a stupid one.’¹¹ For those with conservative views, meanwhile, the growth of a poor, largely uneducated urban underclass led to concerns about a loss of social cohesion and the danger of mob rule, exacerbated by such events as the American and French Revolutions, and the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots in London in 1780. For very different reasons, therefore, there was, towards the end of the eighteenth century, growing pressure from various quarters for improved provision of education for the lower classes.

For general background on this era, I have drawn mainly upon two volumes in the New Oxford History of England: Paul Langford’s *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (1989) and Boyd Hilton’s *A Mad, Bad & Dangerous People? England 1783-1846* (2006).¹² For more detailed background on debates about the value of mass education, I have used Brian Simon’s *Studies in the History of Education 1780-1860* (1960), and H. C. Barnard’s *A History of English Education from 1760* (2nd edition, 1969).¹³

As mentioned above, a particular concern for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reformers was, what would constitute an appropriate level of education for the different social classes? Was there a risk that too much education, or the wrong sort of education, would unfit the lower classes for employment, and possibly lead to

¹¹ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, Book V, Chapter one, part III, cited in H. C. Barnard, *A History of English Education from 1760* (London: University of London Press, 2nd edition, 1969), p. 47.

¹² Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad & Dangerous People? England 1783-1846* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).

¹³ Brian Simon, *Studies in the History of Education 1780-1870* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1960); H. C., Barnard, *A History of English Education from 1760* (London: University of London Press, 2nd edition, 1969).

civil unrest and revolution? The quotation in the title comes from Wordsworth's speech at the laying of the foundation stone of the new village school at Bowness in April 1836, and encapsulates the long-standing belief amongst conservative thinkers that the wrong type of education would make working-class children restless and discontented with their lot, and that such discontent would expose girls to 'perilous temptations.'¹⁴

With these concerns in mind, the related question arose of whether, and if so how, educational institutions should 'police' reading. As Alan Richardson puts it: '[W]ith the unforeseen emergence of a "reading public", eagerly devouring the radical literature exemplified by Paine's *Rights of Man* and Cobbett's *Political Register*, it increasingly became the role of educational institutions to monitor and facilitate the proper ideological functioning of literary texts.'¹⁵ The unresolved issue arising from these concerns was how to regulate the reading of the newly literate, to guard against the detrimental effects of both radicalizing literature and immoral fiction. In the immediate aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, Wordsworth and Southey argued for censorship of radical publications, whereas Coleridge argued instead for improved education, so that the lower classes would be enabled to read with discrimination and would not be led astray by a literate, radical minority. As explained in Chapter one, Hannah More's solution was to flood the market with free or cheap 'improving' material that would drive out both immoral and radicalizing books. Later, as discussed in Chapter five, De Quincey urged a scheme of 'guided

¹⁴ William Wordsworth, 'Speech at the Laying of the Foundation Stone of the New School in the Village of Bowness, Windermere, 1836', *Collected Prose* (3 vols.) ed. by W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), III, 292-296 (p. 296).

¹⁵ Richardson, p. 31.

reading' for the newly literate classes, but was vague about how this could be achieved.

Several consistent themes emerge when considering the development of ideas about the use of literature in education during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For example, several writers, including Wordsworth, Coleridge and De Quincey, and later John Stuart Mill and Matthew Arnold, identified literature, particularly poetry and imaginative fiction such as fairy stories, as an invaluable 'humanizing' force in education, taking children out of themselves, and enabling them to grasp the concept of the infinite. The contrary view, espoused by both conservative writers such as Sarah Trimmer and Hannah More, and progressive writers such as Maria Edgeworth, was that imaginative fiction gave children false ideas about life. Fairy stories and ghost stories in particular carried the additional risk of causing children to become fearful and superstitious, making them either timid adults or disbelievers in religion. As Richardson points out, William Godwin seems to have been alone amongst rationalist writers in defending fairy stories as a necessary complement to 'useful' reading.¹⁶

In *John Locke and Children's Books in Eighteenth-Century England*, Samuel Pickering examines in detail the changing attitudes to children's literature over the eighteenth century, and highlights the ways in which both radical and conservative writers portrayed fairy stories and folk tales as supporting their views, whilst in *Plots of Enlightenment: Education and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England*, Richard Barney looks at how changing social mores and educational priorities were reflected in the plots of popular novels during the period. Nicholas Tucker's *The*

¹⁶ Richardson, p. 127.

Child and the Book: A Psychological and Literary Exploration (1981) examines how this debate about the value of imaginative fiction for children continued into the twentieth century.¹⁷

The reading of novels, particularly ‘sensational’ novels, became a particularly contentious issue towards the end of the eighteenth century. As discussed in Chapter one, both conservative writers such as Hannah More and progressive writers such as Maria Edgeworth believed that the reading of such novels was particularly dangerous to girls and young women, for two reasons. Firstly, such novels risked ‘normalizing’ immoral behaviour. Secondly, they gave young people a false idea of adult life, leading inevitably to disillusion and discontent when faced with the reality of a mundane occupation, whether in paid employment or as a wife and mother.

Another consistent theme is the connection between the provision of elementary education and the widening of the suffrage. Some conservative writers held that a wider suffrage was inevitable, and, this being the case, mass education was the only way of ensuring that the uneducated majority were not radicalized by a few literate radicals. The opposing conservative view was that, firstly, widening the suffrage was undesirable in principle and that, secondly, too much education would make the working class discontented and open to corruption by cheap newspapers and other inflammatory literature. Allied to this was the view that extending the franchise would do nothing to address the real concerns of the working class about, for example, falling wages and rising prices, and their subsequent disillusion would

¹⁷ Samuel F. Pickering, *John Locke and Children's Books in Eighteenth-Century England* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980); Richard A. Barney, *Plots of Enlightenment: Education and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999); Nicholas Tucker, *The Child and the Book: A Psychological and Literary Exploration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

increase their unrest. The radical view, put forward by Hazlitt, was that suffrage was a natural right, and should not be dependent on educational qualifications.

Moreover, working men had a wider experience of life, and thus better judgement, than most scholars. This view was taken to its extremes in the anti-education statements of writers such as Blake and Cobbett. For example, as Richardson points out, Blake stated unequivocally 'Thank God I never was sent to School', whilst Cobbett condemned what he termed the 'education canthers' for, in Richardson's words, 'diverting attention from more fundamental social problems (underemployment, low wages).'¹⁸ This particular argument against over-education was later adopted by both Wordsworth and De Quincey, writing from a conservative viewpoint.

Educational theories in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

In Britain, proposals for reforms to educational practice, often derived from Classical or Renaissance writers, were put forward by Francis Bacon at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and by John Milton in the mid-seventeenth century, and were popularized by John Locke in *Some Thoughts on Education* (1693)

¹⁸ Richardson, pp. 5-6. Richardson does not give a source for Blake's words, which occur in a poem in Blake's Notebooks. The poem in full reads: 'You say their Pictures well Painted be/And yet they are Blockheads you all agree/Thank God, I never was sent to School/To be Flogg'd into following the Stile of a Fool/The Errors of a Wise Man make your Rule/Rather than the Perfections of a Fool.' William Blake, *Complete Writings*, ed. by Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 550. The words in context suggest that Blake is referring specifically to an art school, although in fact he was, from the age of ten, sent to a drawing school directed by Henry Pars. See 'Blake, William (1757-1827)' by Robert Essick in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/2585>> [Accessed 12 October 2017] Cobbett's words are paraphrased from *Rural Rides*, ed. by George Woodcock (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1967), p. 262. Cobbett's focus of criticism is the nascent capitalist system which in his view had resulted in higher prices and lower wages. A similar stance was adopted by De Quincey, as discussed in Chapter five.

towards the end of the century. Their theories, echoed by later writers, centred around the defects of a narrowly Classical education, both in terms of what was taught and, more particularly, how it was taught. Bacon, Milton and Locke all protested at the inordinately long time spent learning Greek and Latin by tedious rote learning in public and grammar schools, when the same level of ability could be achieved in a much shorter time by more imaginative teaching methods, particularly conversation in these languages. Locke's ideas influenced Rousseau's theories, as set out in *Emile: or, On Education* (1762), and Rousseau's theories in turn provoked admiration from many writers, but also hostile responses from both progressive and conservative educational reformers in England, in particular from female reformers including Catharine Macaulay Graham, Mary Wollstonecraft, Maria Edgeworth, and Hannah More, who saw Rousseau's ideas as both immoral and demeaning towards women.

The main primary texts I have consulted for this chapter are John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile: or, On Education* (1762), Catharine Macaulay Graham's *Letters on Education* (1790), Mary Wollstonecraft's *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Maria Edgeworth's *Practical Education* (1798), and Hannah More's *Strictures on Female Education* (1799).¹⁹ Richardson and Mary Hilton

¹⁹ John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, ed. by John W. and Jean S. Yolton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile: or, On Education*, trans. and ed. by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979); Maria Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, in *Novels and Selected Works*, 12 vols. ed. by Mitzi Myers (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998-2003); Hannah More, *Strictures on Female Education* in *Selected Writings of Hannah More*, ed. by Robert Hole (London: William Pickering, 1996) and Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (London: J. Johnson, 1787) and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*, ed. by Janet M. Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

between them cover the range of ideas about education in Britain from roughly the beginning of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century.

During the eighteenth century the Dissenting Academies offered a broad, non-denominational education for middle-class children. The public and grammar schools were usually, though not invariably, narrowly focused on classical studies, and many grammar schools went into a period of decline, which lasted until the middle of the nineteenth century. For information on the role of the Dissenting Academies, I have used two relatively early texts: Irene Parker's *Dissenting Academies in England: their rise and progress and their place among the educational systems of the country* (1914) and Joe Smith's *The Birth of Modern Education: the contribution of the dissenting academies, 1660-1800* (1954).²⁰ The Dissenting Academies underwent a rise followed by a dramatic decline during the eighteenth century. Their decline has been ascribed to various causes, but perhaps the most significant was the identification of key figures in the Academies, such as Joseph Priestley, with radical political causes, in particular the French Revolution. Such views became unacceptable to the majority in view of the Terror and the ensuing wars between Britain and France. In this context, I draw in particular upon *Religious Dissent and the Aikin-Barbould Circle, 1740-1860* (2012), edited by Felicity James and Ian Inkster, which examines in detail the developing links between Nonconformism

²⁰ Irene Parker, *Dissenting academies in England: their rise and progress and their place among the educational systems of the country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914); Joe William Ashley Smith, *The Birth of Modern Education: the contribution of the dissenting academies, 1660-1800* (London: Independent Press, 1954).

in religion, political radicalism, and the 'Utilitarian' approach to education.²¹ Whilst his work centres around Hackney New College, Stephen Burley has investigated many primary sources relating to the decline of individual Academies, collected in his online publication *New College, Hackney (1786-96): A Selection of Printed and Archival Sources* (2015).²²

Towards the end of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the rival monitorial systems of Andrew Bell and Joseph Lancaster grew in size and influence and became of keen interest for writers such as Wordsworth, Southey, Coleridge and, later, De Quincey. Both systems employed similar approaches, whereby teaching was mostly devolved to pupils, with teachers having a supervisory role. Both held out the prospect of teaching large numbers of children at a relatively low cost, which was particularly attractive at a time of rapid population increase and a growing demand for education. Although Bell and Lancaster were initially on good terms, Bell's supporters began to portray Lancaster as a dangerous, Godless radical, who had stolen Bell's ideas. The ensuing controversy, which set the Church of England against other Protestant sects, effectively delayed the introduction of a truly national system of elementary education in England and Wales by several decades. A useful summary of the Bell/Lancaster dispute, and a connected conflict between Southey and Coleridge

²¹ Felicity James and Ian Inkster, eds., *Religious Dissent and the Aikin-Barbault Circle, 1740-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

²² Stephen Burley, *New College, Hackney (1786-96): A Selection of Printed and Archival Sources*. Online publication: <http://www.qmulreligionandliterature.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/DWL-Online-Publication.pdf> [Accessed 3 May 2017].

about which of them had first popularized Bell's ideas, is contained in R. A. Foakes' introductory notes to Coleridge's lectures on education.²³

Wordsworth

Wordsworth's ideas about childhood form a consistent thread in his poetry and, to a lesser extent, in his few published prose writings. Wordsworth's education at Hawkshead Free Grammar School provided both himself and Coleridge with an example of an ideal education, where instruction and leisure time are balanced in such a way that the schoolchildren are 'thriving Prisoners' who, when out of school, are free to 'breathe and to be happy, run and shout.'²⁴ Such freedom was, for Wordsworth himself, enhanced by the fact that during his time at the school he was boarded with a local family, and thus, in his leisure time, free from parental control. For information about Hawkshead Free Grammar School, I referred to both T. W. Thompson's *Wordsworth's Hawkshead; edited, with introduction, notes, and appendixes, by Robert Woof* (1970) and Henry Swainson Cowper's *Hawkshead: The Northernmost Parish of Lancashire* (1899).²⁵ For basic biographical material, I have drawn mainly upon Mary Moorman's two-volume biography (1957, 1965), and Stephen Gill's more recent single-volume biography (1989).²⁶ R. A. Foakes' article

²³ Coleridge, *Collected Works V Lectures, 1808-1819 on literature*, ed. by R. A. Foakes (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), I, 96-102 and 578-9.

²⁴ Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, ed. by Sally Bushell, James A. Butler and Michael C. Jaye (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2007), Book IX, lines 260-64.

²⁵ T. W. Thompson, *Wordsworth's Hawkshead; edited, with introduction, notes, and appendixes, by Robert Woof* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970); Henry Swainson Cowper, *Hawkshead: The Northernmost Parish of Lancashire* (London: Bemrose & Sons, 1899).

²⁶ Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2 vols., 1957, 1965); Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

“‘Thriving Prisoners’: Coleridge, Wordsworth and the Child at School’ (1989)

provided valuable information about the background to Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s advocacy of Bell’s monitorial system.²⁷

Wordsworth’s experiences at Cambridge led to a lifelong distaste for what he termed ‘emulation’ in education. He decided to follow his own course of reading at Cambridge rather than to study for an Honours degree, a choice also made by De Quincey at Oxford University two decades later. Ben Ross Schneider examines Wordsworth’s experiences in Cambridge in *Wordsworth’s Cambridge Education* (1957), which also provides valuable general information on the type of education provided by the University around this time.²⁸ Wordsworth’s ideas on education were mainly described in letters to friends (in some cases possibly intended for publication), where he offers pragmatic advice, often at odds with his own inclination towards ideal rather than useful education. For such material I have relied upon the revised second edition of the *Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth* (1967-84).²⁹

Most writings about Wordsworth’s ideas on education focus upon his support for Andrew Bell’s monitorial system, for example Frances Ferguson’s chapter on

²⁷ R. A. Foakes, “‘Thriving Prisoners’: Coleridge, Wordsworth and the Child at School’ *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Summer, 1989), pp. 187-206.

²⁸ Ben Ross Schneider, *Wordsworth’s Cambridge Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957).

²⁹ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, 7 vols., revised by Alan G. Hill, Mary Moorman and Chester L. Shaver from the First Edition ed. by Ernest De Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967-88).

'Education' in Andrew Bennett's *William Wordsworth in Context* (2015).³⁰ The support of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey for Bell's system is also the focus of the chapter on education in Tom Duggett's *Gothic Romanticism: Architecture, Politics, and Literary Form* (2010). Alan G. Hill's pioneering 1975 article 'Wordsworth, Comenius, and the Meaning of Education' concentrates on Wordsworth's early ideas on education, in particular his and Dorothy's approach to teaching the young Basil Montagu, and argues convincingly against the accepted wisdom that Wordsworth was following Rousseau's ideas when educating Montagu.³¹ Ayumi Mishiro's University of Bristol PhD thesis, *William Wordsworth and Education 1791-1802* (2001) follows Hill, and adds much detail in support of Hill's arguments.³² Duncan Wu's two volumes on Wordsworth's reading provide valuable information on possible sources for Wordsworth's ideas about education.³³

Coleridge

Following the death of his father in 1781, Coleridge was sent at the age of eight to Christ's Hospital School. His autobiographical letters to Thomas Poole, written when Coleridge was twenty-five, describe his life up to the point when he was moved to the main school. Coleridge's education at Christ's Hospital School provided the main focus for his ideas about education. (He rarely spoke or wrote

³⁰ Andrew Bennett (ed.) *William Wordsworth in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

³¹ Alan G. Hill, 'Wordsworth, Comenius, and the Meaning of Education', *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 26, No. 103 (Aug. 1975), pp. 301-312.

³² Ayumi Mishiro, *William Wordsworth and Education 1791-1802* (PhD thesis, University of Bristol, 2001).

³³ Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading, 1770-1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); *Wordsworth's Reading, 1800-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

about his abortive career at the University of Cambridge.) In contrast to Wordsworth's positive experiences at Hawkshead, the lessons Coleridge drew from his education at Christ's Hospital were mainly negative. As well as writing and speaking in his own name about Christ's Hospital, Coleridge collaborated with Charles Lamb, a contemporary at the school, on two very different essays, the first, published in 1813, mainly positive, the second, published in 1820, wholly negative. The two essays encapsulate Coleridge's fundamental ambivalence about his experiences, but the extreme views expressed in both make it necessary to look at others' reports of their experiences. The most useful near-contemporary account is provided by William Scargill in *Recollections of a Blue-Coat Boy* (1829), which, whilst not ignoring the negative aspects of the school, gives a more balanced idea of what day-to-day life was like there.³⁴

While Wordsworth mostly confined his ideas on education to letters to friends, Coleridge set out his ideas at length publicly in lectures and articles for various publications. For these I have used various volumes in the edition of Coleridge's *Collected Works* edited by Kathleen Coburn and others (16 vols., 1967 to 2001). I have also drawn on Coleridge's *Letters* in the edition produced by Earl Leslie Griggs (six volumes, 1956-71) and his *Notebooks*, edited by Kathleen Coburn (five volumes, 1957-2002). For secondary biographical material, I have mainly used Richard Holmes' two-volume biography (1997, 1998), but have been cautious with this, as Holmes ignores much that is negative in Coleridge's life and continually portrays Coleridge as a passive victim of others.

³⁴ William Pitt Scargill, *Recollections of a Blue-Coat Boy* (Swaffham: F. Skill, 1829; reprinted Wakefield: S. R. Publishers Ltd., 1968).

Parts of this chapter have their origins in my 2015 University of Bristol MA dissertation “‘Breeding up children to be happy’: Coleridge’s ideal system of education.”

Hazlitt

Hazlitt’s unconventional education at Hackney New College, a leading Dissenting Academy, was, by his own choice, abruptly terminated at the age of sixteen, and thereafter he was essentially self-taught. For Hazlitt’s education at Hackney, I have mainly relied on the work of Stephen Burley, in particular his *Hazlitt the Dissenter: Religion, Philosophy, and Politics 1766-1816* (2014).³⁵ In more general terms, Duncan Wu’s biography *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man* (2006), whilst useful, gives Hazlitt the benefit of the doubt in all of the many controversies in which Hazlitt was involved, not least his relationship with Sarah Walker, as described in by Hazlitt in *Liber Amoris* (1823), and is correspondingly condemnatory of Coleridge. A more balanced view of Hazlitt is given in Catherine Macdonald Maclean’s dated, but still valuable biography *Born Under Saturn: a biography of William Hazlitt* (1943). Herschel Baker’s *William Hazlitt* (1962) is comprehensive, but Baker is occasionally prone to make unsupported statements about Hazlitt’s motivations.³⁶ Unfortunately there is no satisfactory edition of Hazlitt’s letters to complement those of

³⁵ Stephen Burley, *Hazlitt the Dissenter: Religion, Philosophy, and Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

³⁶ Catherine Macdonald Maclean, *Born Under Saturn: a biography of William Hazlitt* (London: Collins, 1943); Herschel Baker, *William Hazlitt* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962).

Wordsworth and Coleridge. I have used Herschel Moreland Sikes' single-volume edition.³⁷

Hazlitt's ideas about the purpose and value of education constantly evolved and were often contradictory. In particular, Hazlitt had a deeply ambiguous attitude to Classical education. In some of his writings he portrays a Classical education as the ideal, as distinguished from 'useful' education, a distinction also made by Wordsworth and Coleridge and later by De Quincey and John Stuart Mill. At the same time, Hazlitt believed that narrow scholarship had, with very few exceptions, a limiting effect on a person's ability to cope with the real world. Perhaps surprisingly for a writer usually identified as a radical, Hazlitt was also uncompromisingly opposed to the sort of Utilitarian education proposed by Jeremy Bentham, perhaps the only area where Hazlitt's views on education coincided with those of Coleridge in the latter's conservative phase.

For primary material in this chapter I have drawn upon both Duncan Wu's 1998 edition of Hazlitt's selected writings and his collection of newly discovered pieces (two volumes, 2007), and Percival Presland Howe's dated, but more complete edition of Hazlitt's works, published between 1930 and 1934. Howe's edition is particularly useful for tracking different versions of Hazlitt's essays, where Wu sometimes glosses over such changes.³⁸

³⁷ William Hazlitt, *Letters*, ed. by Herschel Moreland Sikes (London: Macmillan, 1979).

³⁸ William Hazlitt, *Selected Writings* (8 vols.), ed. by Duncan Wu (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998); William Hazlitt, *New Writings* (2 vols.) ed. by Duncan Wu (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); William Hazlitt, *Complete Works* (20 vols.), ed. by Percival Presland Howe (London: Dent, 1930-34).

De Quincey

In some ways, De Quincey can be seen as a bridge between the ideas of Coleridge and Wordsworth and Victorian writers on education. Something of a childhood prodigy who valued learning for its own sake, De Quincey abruptly terminated his education at both Manchester Grammar School and the University of Oxford, decisions which he later regretted. De Quincey wrote a great deal about his educational experiences, and as time went on became less cautious about naming individuals and more outspoken in his opinions. Like Coleridge, De Quincey often promised, but never actually delivered, proposals for an ideal course of education. His concerns about the deleterious effects of mass literacy on both social stability and on the quality of literature, as well as reflecting the concerns of earlier writers, anticipate the fears of Matthew Arnold as described in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869).

De Quincey's ultra-conservative views on education hark back to the ideas of earlier writers, such as Bernard Mandeville, that too much education would unfit the lower classes for work. De Quincey's view that parents had an absolute right not to educate their children, free from State diktat, provides an alternative perspective on the concept of 'liberty' in education to that of liberal writers such as John Stuart Mill. De Quincey's concerns on this point are not dissimilar to the earlier radical view that compulsory State education risked indoctrination, a danger highlighted by William Godwin towards the end of the eighteenth century. From a conservative point of view, compulsory education was an infringement of parents' rights to decide how, or indeed if, their children should be educated, and moreover risked radicalising the working class because inflammatory literature, particularly in cheap newspapers, would increase to meet the needs of the newly literate population. De Quincey fought a lengthy rearguard action against compulsory education, but by the 1850s

public sentiment was moving in the opposite direction, and the debate became focused on how, rather than whether, compulsory education should be provided.

For De Quincey's own writings, I have drawn on the Pickering & Chatto edition of his *Works* supervised by Grevel Lindop (21 vols., 2000-2003). As well as this primary material, I have referred to three relatively recent biographies, by Grevel Lindop, Robert Morrison and Frances Wilson.³⁹ Very little seems to have been written about De Quincey's ideas on education, but Cian Duffy's article "'His "Canaille" of an Audience": Thomas De Quincey and the Revolution in Reading' (2005) provides a valuable insight into De Quincey's concerns about the effects of mass literacy, whilst Brian McGrath's 'Thomas De Quincey and the Language of Literature: Or, on the Necessity of Ignorance' (2007) usefully clarifies De Quincey's developing ideas about the 'power' of literature.⁴⁰

The 'Afterlives' of Wordsworth and Coleridge in Victorian educational theory and practice

As Ian Reid and J. P. Ward demonstrate, both John Stuart Mill and Matthew Arnold were inspired by Wordsworth's poetry into placing great emphasis on the value of literature in education.⁴¹ Mill's ideas about education are explored at length

³⁹ Grevel Lindop, *The Opium-Eater: A Life of Thomas De Quincey* (London: Weidenfield, 1993); Robert Morrison, *The English Opium-Eater: A Biography of Thomas De Quincey* (London: Weidenfield & Nicholson, 2009), Frances Wilson, *Guilty Thing: A Biography of Thomas De Quincey* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

⁴⁰ Cian Duffy, "'His "Canaille" of an Audience": Thomas De Quincey and the Revolution in Reading', *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 44, No. 1, Thomas De Quincey: Essays upon the Occasion of a New Edition (Spring, 2005), pp. 7-22; Brian McGrath 'Thomas De Quincey and the Language of Literature: Or, on the Necessity of Ignorance', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 47, No. 4, The Nineteenth Century (Autumn, 2007), pp. 847-62.

⁴¹ Ian Reid, *Wordsworth and the Formation of English Studies* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); J. P. Ward, "'Came from Yon Fountain": Wordsworth's Influence on Victorian Educators', *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Spring, 1986), pp. 405-36.

in F. W. Garforth's two book-length studies, and these have proved very useful in clarifying the process by which Mill's ideas developed.⁴² For primary material, I have used the edition of Mill's works (33 vols., 1963-1991) supervised by John M. Robson at the University of Toronto.

Arnold's views about the use of literature in education reflect a gradual lowering of expectations about the type of poetry suitable for use in the classroom. A selection of Arnold's Reports as Inspector of Education was published by HMSO at the beginning of the twentieth century and I have used these reports to track his developing ideas.⁴³ Arnold consistently took a favourable view of the standardized approach to education in continental Europe, as opposed to the piecemeal approach which persisted in England until the Forster Education Act of 1870. For primary material I have used R. H. Super's edition of Arnold's collected prose writings (11 vols., 1960-1977). Super's notes provide useful background information on Arnold's various visits to European countries to examine their educational systems, and the information he gathered there on how literature was used in teaching.⁴⁴

Whilst both Mill and Arnold supported universal elementary education, there were fundamental differences in their underlying philosophies and their proposed approaches to specific problems. In Chapter six I examine the debate around the concept of 'payment by results', by which pupils' learning would be assessed by

⁴² F. W. Garforth, *John Stuart Mill's Theory of Education* (Oxford: Martin Robertson & Company Limited, 1979); F. W. Garforth, *Educative Democracy: John Stuart Mill on Education in Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

⁴³ Matthew Arnold, *Reports on elementary schools 1852-1882*, ed. by F. S. Marvin (London: HMSO, 1908).

⁴⁴ Matthew Arnold, *Complete Prose Works* (11 vols), ed. by R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962-77).

regular examinations and teachers' pay would be increased or decreased depending on their pupils' performance. In Mill's view, the State needed to know whether children were being taught well and, by extension, whether teachers were doing their job properly, and he believed that this could only be ascertained through examinations. Arnold foresaw the risk that, in such a system, pupils would be 'crammed' with facts to get them through examinations, with a consequent debasing of education to mere surface learning, and a fatal separation between word and object, a danger identified by Comenius two centuries earlier.

Chapter six also considers some wider trends in education during the nineteenth century, including the temporary decline of the grammar school and the rise of the commercial academies, and here Geoffrey Best's *Mid-Victorian Britain 1851-75* (1979) provides a useful guide to the bewildering variety of education offered before the introduction of compulsory elementary education.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Geoffrey Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain 1851-75* (London: Fontana Press, 1979).

Chapter One: Educational theories in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

This chapter explores the background to ideas about education in England from the beginning of the seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth century, starting with Francis Bacon's *Of the Proficiency and Advancement of Learning, Divine and Human* (1605), and ending with Hannah More's *Strictures on Female Education* (1799). It explores some of the major controversies in education in this period, such as the issue of home versus school tuition, the need for, and dangers of, mass education for the 'lower orders', and the arguments for and against the use of imaginative literature in education. I also consider the rise and sudden decline of the Dissenting Academies, and the controversies surrounding the rival monitorial systems of Andrew Bell and Joseph Lancaster.

Francis Bacon's *The Advancement of Learning* (1605)

A key early educational text in Britain was Francis Bacon's *Of the Proficiency and Advancement of Learning, Divine and Human* (1605), usually referred to as *The Advancement of Learning*. In what were to become recurring themes for later writers on educational reform, Bacon decried the use of rote learning and what he saw as an over-reliance on the study of Classical authors, particularly Aristotle, and advocated learning directly from nature. Although Bacon systematically classified different types of knowledge, he did not attempt to impose a hierarchy upon them. As Perez Zagorin puts it: 'Bacon did not hierarchize the sciences or parts of knowledge, nor did he give primacy to the theoretical and contemplative over the practical disciplines.'⁴⁶ Bacon saw methodical experimentation as essential to the progress of

⁴⁶ Perez Zagorin, *Francis Bacon* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 59.

knowledge and his 'insistence on the essential value of craft knowledge and processes [...] was a fundamental Baconian tenet that he reiterated throughout his work.'⁴⁷ By contrast, Wordsworth, Coleridge, De Quincey and, to some extent, Hazlitt, would regard some types of knowledge as superior to others; in particular valuing theoretical over practical knowledge (see Chapters two, three, four and five), and this preference was reiterated by Mill, Arnold and John Henry Newman in the latter half of the nineteenth century (see Chapter six).

Bacon's writings on education, largely ignored in his lifetime, were influential with Puritan educational reformers later in the seventeenth century, who saw the study of nature as a means of knowing the works of God without the intervention of man-made 'authorities'. Bacon's ideas were further popularised in the 1640s by a Czech educationalist, John Comenius, who also advocated making learning enjoyable, so that it became 'but a pleasant paines-taking, or serious recreation.'⁴⁸ Comenius visited England with the intention of implementing his educational philosophy in a system of schools to be built across the country, but his visit was cut short, and the schools were never built, because of a lack of funds and the impending Civil War.⁴⁹ By the time of the Restoration, Comenius's ideas had become tainted by association with Puritanism, but some aspects, particularly his criticism of rote learning, were

⁴⁷ Zagorin, p. 62.

⁴⁸ John Comenius *A Reformation of Schooles* (1642), cited in Richard A. Barney *Plots of Enlightenment: Education and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 47. Comenius had even more radical ideas, including a proposal that the State should sponsor non-scholastic learning for children of both sexes and all social classes, but these ideas were in a book written in Latin and not translated into English until the late nineteenth century (see Barney, p. 48).

⁴⁹ Barney, p. 48.

taken forward by educational reformers, who advocated a more empirical approach to learning. As discussed in Chapter two, Wordsworth owned a copy of the 1777 edition of Comenius's *Orbis Pictus* (1658), arguably the first picture-book for children published in England, and it seems likely that Wordsworth's ideas on education, in particular his insistence on the need to associate words with things, drew on Comenius.

John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693)

A particularly influential text from the closing decade of the seventeenth century was John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693). *Some Thoughts* draws heavily on some of the ideas put forward by Bacon and Comenius, and also on Milton's 'Of Education' (1644), in some instances quoting almost verbatim from the latter.⁵⁰ Locke focused on what he saw as the chief failings of contemporary educational practices, which remained more or less those criticized by Bacon almost a century earlier; a reliance on rote learning, and, particularly at public and grammar schools and the universities, a narrow focus on the Classics to the exclusion of almost every other subject. In line with Montaigne, Bacon and Comenius, Locke condemned the excessive use of corporal punishment in education as counterproductive and suggested that learning should be made enjoyable through the use of educational toys. These ideas were echoed by later writers on education, though they remained contentious issues throughout the nineteenth century, and they form a common thread in the educational theories of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hazlitt and De Quincey, as I will explore in Chapters two, three, four and five.

⁵⁰ Milton, 'Of Education', in *The Collected Prose of John Milton II 1643-1648*, ed. by Ernest Sirluck (New Haven: Yale University Press London: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 357-415.

Locke's aim in *Some Thoughts* is explicit: '[T]he principal aim of my Discourse is, how a young Gentleman should be brought up from his Infancy.'⁵¹ *Some Thoughts* therefore covers all aspects of a child's upbringing from its earliest years, and discusses such matters as diet, clothing and exercise as well as education. Locke argues that as a child grows, so will his 'Liberty', and 'in a great many things, he must be trusted to his own conduct.' The aim of education should therefore be to raise a child so that as a man he is able to '*deny himself* his own Desires, cross his own Inclinations, and purely follow what Reason directs as best, tho' the appetite lean the other way.'⁵² Children should be 'used to submit their Desires, and go without their Longings, even *from their very Cradles*.'⁵³ This formation of character was, in Locke's view, far more important than what is taught, as it is much more difficult to alter character and ingrained patterns of behaviour than it is to instil knowledge of any sort.

In terms of education, Locke points out the folly of forcing children to learn through fear of punishment. He argues that not only is this approach likely to fail, but even if it succeeds by breaking the child's spirit, that is a worse outcome, because:

[I]n the place of a disorderly young Fellow, you have a *low-spirited, moap'd* Creature: Who, however with his unnatural sobriety he may please silly People, who commend tame, unactive Children [...] will probably prove as

⁵¹ Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, p. 86.

⁵² Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, p. 103.

⁵³ Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, p. 108.

uncomfortable a thing to his Friends, as he will be, all his life, an useless thing to himself and others.⁵⁴

Locke was moreover firmly in favour of education with a *purpose*, one that would equip a young man with the knowledge and skills needed to earn a living. However, in contrast to some later Utilitarian writers on education, he also focused on the need to produce a 'rounded' individual, who was able to think for himself, rather than simply being an empty vessel into which information was poured. Locke also emphasized the importance of fresh air and exercise as a counter-balance to study, and the acquisition of practical skills, even by wealthy young men, to complement theoretical studies.

Locke was particularly opposed to the rote teaching of Latin and Greek. He saw such methods as inefficient and likely to instil a lifelong distaste for learning. In his words: 'How [...] is it possible that a Child should be chain'd to the Oar, Seven, Eight, or Ten of the best Years of his Life, to get a Language or Two, which, I think, might be had a great deal cheaper rate of Pains and Time, and be learn'd almost in playing?'⁵⁵ Locke is here echoing a similar complaint made by Milton some fifty years previously in 'Of Education': 'we do amisse [sic] to spend seven or eight years in scraping together so much miserable Latin, and Greek, as might be learnt otherwise easily and delightfully in one year.'⁵⁶

Milton had also seen learning by rote as leading inevitably to a dissociation between words and things, with the result that, 'though a linguist should pride

⁵⁴ Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, p. 113.

⁵⁵ Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, p. 207.

⁵⁶ Milton, 'Of Education', pp. 370-71.

himselfe to have all the tongues that *Babel* cleft the world into, yet if he have not studied the solid things in them [...] he were nothing so much to be esteem'd a learned man, as any yeoman or tradesman competently wise in his mother dialect only.'⁵⁷ Milton had also advocated exercise and fresh air as a counter-balance to study: 'when the air is calm and pleasant, it were an injury and sullenness against nature not to go out, and see her riches, and partake in her rejoycing [sic] with heaven and earth.'⁵⁸ The strictures of Milton and Locke against rote learning were later echoed by Wordsworth, Coleridge and Hazlitt amongst others, but rote learning remained the normal method of teaching the Classics (and most other subjects) until well into the nineteenth century, and, indeed was reinforced by the Revised Code for education, as discussed in Chapter six.

Locke is perhaps best remembered for his idea, taken from Aristotle, that the infant mind is a *tabula rasa*, or blank slate.⁵⁹ As mentioned above, a key theme in *Some Thoughts* is the need for parents, with the assistance of tutors, to instil in children good habits of self-denial and industry, as, without these virtues, teaching will be useless. Thus, as discussed below, Locke's ideas had appeal both for progressive thinkers, who welcomed his repudiation of rote learning and regular corporal punishment, and for conservative thinkers, who welcomed his emphasis on the need to form children's characters and instil good habits.

Some writers in the early eighteenth century questioned the need for even basic education of working-class children. Bernard Mandeville added to *The Fable of*

⁵⁷ Milton, 'Of Education', p. 369.

⁵⁸ Milton, 'Of Education', pp. 412-13.

⁵⁹ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by Peter N. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits (1723) an 'Essay on Charity and Charity Schools', aimed at refuting the 'moral' arguments of writers such as Addison and Steele, who claimed, in Mandeville's words, that: 'Children that are taught the Principles of Religion and can read the Word of God have a greater Opportunity to improve in Virtue and good Morality [...] than others that are suffer'd to run at random and have no body to look after them.'⁶⁰ Mandeville counters that, on the contrary: 'Charity-schools, and everything else that promotes Idleness, and keeps the Poor from working, are more Accessary [sic] to Growth of Villany [sic], than the want of Reading and Writing, or even the grossest Ignorance and Stupidity.'⁶¹

Foreshadowing arguments later advanced by Wordsworth, Coleridge and De Quincey that education would unfit the working classes for labour appropriate to their place in life, he adds: 'Those who spent a great part of their Youth in Learning to Read, Write and Cypher, expect, and not unjustly, to be employ'd where those Qualifications may be of use to them; the generality [...] will look down upon downright Labour with the utmost contempt.'⁶² This ultra-reactionary view of education is, ironically, not far from that of Hazlitt, who from a radical perspective, argued that the common sense of working people would be impaired by formal education (see Chapter four).

The debate about whether education or ignorance of the working classes constituted the lesser of two evils continued throughout the eighteenth century, but by the end of the century the consensus, even amongst conservatives, was the view

⁶⁰ Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: Or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, ed. by Phillip Harth (London: Penguin Press, 1970), pp. 276-77, cited in Richardson, p. 83.

⁶¹ Mandeville, p. 278.

⁶² Mandeville, pp. 294-95.

expounded by Sarah Trimmer that ‘the education of the children of the poor [...] should not be left to their ignorant and corrupted parents; it is a public concern, and should be regarded as a public business.’⁶³ However, as late as the 1850s the opposite view, that children were essentially the property of their parents, who should therefore have complete control over their education, was still being put forward by De Quincey amongst others (see Chapter five).

As discussed below, the provision of cheap or free education for children of poor families gradually became institutionalized in the early decades of the nineteenth century, initially through the rival ‘monitorial’ systems of Bell and Lancaster. Richardson cites the support of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey for Bell’s system as evidence of their increasing tendency towards an authoritarian approach to education. I will argue in subsequent chapters that this is an oversimplification of the reasons for these individuals’ attraction to Bell’s ideas.⁶⁴ State funding for Bell’s and Lancaster’s schools set a precedent that ultimately led to a national system of compulsory elementary education.

Rousseau’s *Emile: or, On Education* (1762)

Another influential educational text was Rousseau’s *Emile: or, On Education*. Rousseau went even further than earlier writers in denigrating the use of corporal punishment and rote-learning. Building on, but considerably modifying, the ideas of Bacon, Comenius and Locke, in *Emile* Rousseau advocated learning through discovery, with the ‘discovery’ being carefully, and surreptitiously, guided by parents and tutors. Rousseau followed Locke in urging continual surveillance of children and

⁶³ Sarah Trimmer, *The Oeconomy of Charity* (1801), quoted in Boyd Hilton, p. 536.

⁶⁴ Richardson, pp. 91-98.

minimising their contact with servants. Declaring 'I hate books', Rousseau proposes that Emile should be allowed to read only one book, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), throughout his education. Until the age of sixteen, *Robinson Crusoe* should act as his 'entertainment and instruction'.⁶⁵

Rousseau is often thought of as having rejected Locke's idea of the mind as a *tabula rasa*, but in *Emile* he follows Locke in insisting on the need for parents and tutors to mould an infant's mind through guided discovery. In contrast to Locke's insistence on the need for strict adherence to the truth in education, however, Rousseau advocated the use of 'pious frauds' to trick children into behaving well, as young children were not, in his view, able to judge for themselves what would constitute correct or reasonable behaviour. As well as antagonising conservative writers on education such as Hannah More, this suggestion also aroused criticism amongst radical writers such as Godwin, as Richardson points out.⁶⁶ As discussed below, Rousseau's ideas about female education were anathema to proto-feminist writers such as Catherine Macaulay and Mary Wollstonecraft, and I will argue in Chapter four that Hazlitt's views about women's minds can be traced to his early reading of Rousseau.

Although *Emile* is more of a thought experiment about education and child development than a practical manual, it was very influential. In Britain, Rousseau's ideas in *Emile* were popularised by Thomas Day in his hugely successful children's

⁶⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile: or On Education*, ed. and trans. Allan Bloom (New York, Basic Books, 1979), p. 185.

⁶⁶ Richardson, p. 50.

novel *Sandford and Merton*, published in three volumes between 1783 and 1789.⁶⁷

The book compares and contrasts the differing fates of a hard-working poor boy and an idle rich one, the rich boy being gradually educated into virtue by the example of the poor boy, with the education of the rich boy involving many of the types of 'pious frauds' advocated in *Emile*. The book proved hugely popular and remained in print well into the nineteenth century.⁶⁸ Leigh Hunt in his *Autobiography* ascribed to his childhood reading of *Sandford and Merton* his 'resolution of standing by a principle' whatever the consequences.⁶⁹

The French Revolution, and the wars between Britain and France that followed, quickly led to Rousseau's fall from favour in Britain. For conservative writers on education, such as Hannah More and Sarah Trimmer, Rousseau's name became a by-word for dangerous radicalism, immorality, and Godlessness. In Hannah More's words: 'Rousseau was the first popular dispenser of this complicated drug, in which the deleterious infusion was strong, and the effect proportionably

⁶⁷ Day was a somewhat eccentric figure, who attempted to model his life on the lines laid out by Rousseau. He adopted two young girls from a foundling hospital, intending to marry one when she came of age. Unfortunately, neither proved suitable, and Day eventually married an heiress, whom he persuaded to give away most of her fortune for philanthropic purposes. Day was killed when thrown from a horse he was attempting to train without the use of the whip. See 'Day, Thomas (1748-1789)' by Peter Rowland in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/7372>> [Accessed 4 November, 2016].

⁶⁸ Indeed, it remained in print for so long that as late as 1889 Jerome K. Jerome was able to make a joking reference to the book in *Three Men in a Boat*, in the expectation that his readers would recognize it. The narrator describes a schoolfellow, known as 'Sandford and Merton', who 'used to get into awful rows for sitting up in bed and reading Greek; and as for French irregular verbs there was simply no keeping him away from them. He was full of weird and unnatural notions about being a credit to his parents and an honour to the school; and he yearned to win prizes, and grow up and be a clever man, and had all those sorts of weak-minded ideas.'

⁶⁹ James Henry Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography*, ed. by Edmund Blunden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), p. 71.

[sic] fatal.’⁷⁰ The accusation of Godlessness was extended to writers and thinkers who were seen as having been influenced by Rousseau’s ideas; in More’s words ‘that sober and unsuspected mass of mischief, which, by assuming the plausible names of Science, of Philosophy, of Arts, of Belles Lettres, is gradually administering death to the [Christian] principles of those who would be on their guard, had the poison been labelled with its own pernicious title.’⁷¹ This association of science in particular with radicalism was reinforced by the enthusiasm with which scientists such as Joseph Priestley had welcomed the French Revolution (see Chapter four).

Catharine Macaulay’s *Letters on Education* (1790)

Catherine Macaulay had made her name with her *History of England from the Accession of James I to the Revolution*, published in eight volumes from 1763, but had fallen into obscurity following a period of ill-health and her controversial second marriage in 1778 to a much younger man.⁷² *Letters on Education*, published under her second married surname of Graham, prefigure some of the ideas of both Mary Wollstonecraft and Hannah More, particularly in her criticisms of Rousseau. The *Letters*, addressed to ‘Hortensia’, supposedly aim to advise on the education of Hortensia’s son, but also contain Macaulay’s ideas about the education of girls. Macaulay’s Preface makes it clear that her ideas are aimed exclusively at the education of the upper classes, (the *Letters* presuppose that the boy is to be taught

⁷⁰ Hannah More, ‘*Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*’ in *Selected Writings of Hannah More*, ed. by Robert Hole (London: William Pickering, 1996), pp. 121-236 (p. 135).

⁷¹ Hannah More, *Strictures*, p. 134.

⁷² See ‘Macaulay [née Sawbridge; other married name Graham], Catharine (1731–1791)’, by Brigid Hill in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/17344>> [Accessed 8 May 2018].

by a resident tutor) and she is unapologetic about this. In her words, 'the education of the great, were it properly attended to, would be felt in the improved virtue of all the subordinate classes of citizens.'⁷³ Macaulay follows Milton and Locke in recommending fresh air and exercise to complement study, and offers advice on suitable diets for children. She also follows Locke, and prefigures Maria Edgeworth, in suggesting that, for younger children especially, learning will be more effective if it is combined with play.

Macaulay offers detailed advice on the sort of reading suitable for younger and older children. For the former, she follows Locke in severely criticizing the telling of stories about 'ghosts and hobgoblins, giants and dwarfs, sorcerers and witches' to children simply because children enjoy such stories and hints at the 'baneful effects' in young minds resulting from hearing 'such trash.'⁷⁴ Macaulay dismisses traditional tales such as Tom Hickathrift and Jack the Giant-Killer as 'mere negatives in their effect on the mind', but condemns completely any books which suggest that virtue will be rewarded with 'some carnal advantage'.⁷⁵ The only books Macaulay unreservedly recommends are those of Madame de Genlis, particularly *Les Amis Des Enfans* (1782); which 'must afford both pleasure and instruction from the

⁷³ Catherine Macaulay Graham, *Letters on Education* (Dublin: H. Chamberlain and Rice, 1790), p. ix. As discussed in Chapter two, Wordsworth similarly held that increased education for the poor would be worthless without an improvement in the morals and behaviour of the upper classes.

⁷⁴ Macaulay Graham, *Letters on Education*, p. 52.

⁷⁵ This prefigures the opposition of Coleridge and Southey to Lancaster's monitorial system, which combined 'shaming' punishments with monetary rewards for good behaviour.

period previous to their having acquired the art of reading, to the time when their taste and judgement is sufficiently matured to enter into a high line of literature.’⁷⁶

For older children, Macaulay suggests a broad curriculum, going beyond the Classics to include geography, physics, writing, arithmetic and French, the latter to be taught by conversation with ‘French domestics’. From the age of fourteen, history, both ancient and modern should be taught, with the ‘rudiments’ of Greek being learned from the age of fifteen. From the age of sixteen, but not before, children should begin a course of ‘moral lectures’, and should also begin to read major works of English literature, including Addison, Milton, and selected works of Pope and Shakespeare. French poetry should be limited to Boileau, with some plays of Racine, Corneille and Moliere, and the works of Voltaire. By the age of eighteen, an intelligent boy should be able to read ‘with satisfaction’ Plato, Demosthenes, Homer, Euripides and Sophocles.’⁷⁷

Macaulay is dismissive of most contemporary novels, which in her view, teach that ‘love is an unconquerable passion, that every fine mind is subject to its infection; and that individuals are paired by some power of sympathy to which they are so absolutely subjected, that the most obdurate heart must yield when the destined

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 54. Madame de Genlis was a French educationalist, who had acted as governess and tutor to the future King Louis Phillipe. She was ‘reputedly also a strict taskmaster when it came to learning and education. Her students’ activities began as early as 6.30 in the morning, and the children were kept busy all day. Subjects the children studied included literature, mythology, mathematics, chemistry, geography, physics, and anatomy. Foreign languages were also greatly emphasized, and the children practiced them regularly learning Italian from the chambermaid, German from the gardener, and English from the valet.’ See <https://www.naomiclifford.com/madame-de-genlis-geri-walton/> [Accessed 2 October 2018].

⁷⁷ Macaulay Graham, *Letters on Education*, pp. 83-4.

object comes into view.’⁷⁸ Of established novels, *Don Quixote* (1605-1615) may be ‘read at any period of life, without leaving any mischievous impressions on the mind’, but the same cannot be said for many of the works of Fielding, Richardson, or Alain Le Sage’s *Gil Blas* (1715-35), which, Macaulay says, ‘is one of the last books I should put into the hands of youth.’⁷⁹

Perhaps the most controversial section of the *Letters* is Chapter XXII, which is entitled ‘No Characteristic Distinction in Sex’. Macaulay takes issue with Rousseau’s view that because women are subservient to men this must mean that such subservience is ‘natural’ because women are intellectually inferior to men. She describes Rousseau’s suggestion that the combination of a man and a woman results in a ‘moral person’ as an idea ‘which, for contradiction and absurdity, outdoes every metaphysical riddle that was ever formed in the schools. [...] It is not reason, it is not wit; it is pride and sensuality that speak in Rousseau.’⁸⁰ Macaulay then asks why women are subservient to men in contemporary societies, and suggests that this is entirely due to ‘a false notion of beauty and delicacy’, by which a girl’s ‘system of nerves is depraved before they come out of the nursery.’⁸¹ In later life, the only ideal that is held out to young women is to gain ‘the admiration of the other sex’ and as a result ‘Vanity, and its companion Envy, must taint, in their characters, every native

⁷⁸ Macaulay Graham, *Letters on Education*, p. 91.

⁷⁹ Macaulay Graham, *Letters on Education*, pp. 91-92. *Gil Blas* is a picaresque novel about the adventures of a young man who works his way up from a valet to become a royal favourite and retires as a wealthy man. As noted in Chapter two, *Gil Blas* was one of the books Wordsworth read in his father’s library. It was also a childhood favourite of Dickens.

⁸⁰ Macaulay Graham, *Letters on Education*, p. 129.

⁸¹ Macaulay Graham, *Letters on Education*, pp. 129-30.

and every acquired excellence.' The resulting 'vices and foibles', are, in Macaulay's opinion, why women have historically been subjected to the 'censure and ridicule of [male] writers of all description.'⁸²

Macaulay is also critical of Rousseau's proposed use of 'pious frauds' in education. In a Chapter of the *Letters* entitled 'The Vice of Lying', she writes: 'I cannot agree with Rousseau in the notion, that it is right to keep children in ignorance of the difference between truth and falsehood.' Instead, she argues, anticipating both Maria Edgeworth and Coleridge, it is essential to be 'very particular in explaining to them the nature of this moral difference.' Macaulay insists that children should be taught to adhere strictly to the truth at all times, because 'habits of falsehood are acquired, and the storyteller, who first lies only to amuse, at length repeats his transgression whenever it may suit his turn.'⁸³ She rejects the suggestion that voluntary truth-telling should be rewarded, because children combine 'the cunning of the serpent' with 'the innocence of the dove' and will soon learn to escape punishment by quickly confessing their misdeeds, with the result that 'their trespasses would daily encrease [sic] both in their number and their degree of culpability.'⁸⁴

The *Letters* were published the year after the French Revolution, but at this early stage, before the Reign of Terror and the Napoleonic Wars, Macaulay's advocacy of French writers, and to some extent even her ideas about female equality, were relatively unproblematic. Macaulay died the year after the *Letters* were

⁸² Macaulay Graham, *Letters on Education*, pp. 130-31.

⁸³ Macaulay Graham, *Letters on Education*, pp. 53-56.

⁸⁴ Macaulay Graham, *Letters on Education*, pp. 54-55.

published, but before her death she corresponded briefly with Mary Wollstonecraft, who expressed admiration for the book.⁸⁵ Wollstonecraft, however, said of Macaulay's statement that there was 'No Characteristic difference in sex' that 'The Observations on this subject might have been carried much farther.'⁸⁶ She took up the challenge in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).

Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

In the increasingly reactionary environment following the French Revolution, a radical change in educational practices was advocated by Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Her earlier work on education, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) was relatively conservative, and, like Macaulay's *Letters*, based largely around the ideas of Locke. In this earlier work, Wollstonecraft continually stresses the need to keep a young girl 'modest', as far as possible preventing her from becoming 'forward' and 'pert' and losing her 'becoming modesty.'⁸⁷ Wollstonecraft goes on to say that the three most important things a child should be taught are 'a strict adherence to truth, a proper subordination to superiors, and condescension to inferiors.'⁸⁸ Throughout, the tone is not dissimilar to

⁸⁵ See 'Macaulay [née Sawbridge; other married name Graham], Catharine (1731–1791)', by Brigid Hill in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/17344>> [Accessed 8 May 2018].

⁸⁶ *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, VII, *On poetry; Contributions to the "Analytical review", 1788-1797*, ed. by Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (London: William Pickering 1989), p. 31, cited in Caroline Franklin, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 102.

⁸⁷ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* IV, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters, The Female Reader, Original Stories, Letters on the Management of Infants, Lessons*, ed. by Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (London: William Pickering, 1989), p. 11.

⁸⁸ Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, p. 11.

that later adopted by Hannah More; school learning and ‘accomplishments’ tend only to be of superficial value, ‘artificial manners’ and ‘affectation’ are to be avoided, whilst the reading of ‘judicious books’ will ‘enlarge the mind and improve the heart.’⁸⁹ Wollstonecraft concludes her section on reading with the platitudinous statement that ‘No employment of the mind is a sufficient excuse for neglecting domestic duties, and I cannot conceive that they are incompatible. A woman may fit herself to be the companion and friend of a man of sense, and yet know how to take care of his family.’⁹⁰ In this book, Wollstonecraft urges education at home whenever possible, and, in line with Locke, sees boarding schools as likely to expose a girl to ‘improper books’ and the bad example of ‘vicious children.’ At school, ‘The temper is neglected, the same lessons are taught to all, and some get a smattering of things they have not the capacity ever to understand; few things are learnt thoroughly, but many follies contracted.’⁹¹

A Vindication, by contrast, urges State funding of free, co-educational schools for girls and boys up to the age of nine, and specialised, vocational education depending on ability thereafter. As Janet Todd points out in her Introduction to *A Vindication*, many of Wollstonecraft’s supposedly radical ideas were, perhaps surprisingly, still very close to those of Hannah More:

From the outset of the eighteenth century, there had been repeated warnings that the sentimental woman might prefer to live in the fantasy of books rather than face the bracing reality of marital life. [...] Wollstonecraft followed these

⁸⁹ Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, p 20.

⁹⁰ Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, p. 21.

⁹¹ Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, p. 22

writers in claiming that sentimental novels could shake a girl's principles. [...]

Here [...] the enlightened Wollstonecraft sounds indistinguishable from the conservative Hannah More who refused to read her.⁹²

Wollstonecraft, in Chapter XII of *A Vindication*, repeats the strictures from earlier in the century about public schools, claiming that such schools are:

[T]he hot-beds of vice and folly, and the knowledge of human nature supposed to be attained there, merely cunning selfishness. [...] At school boys become gluttons and slovens, and, instead of cultivating domestic affections, very early rush into libertinism which destroys the constitution before it is formed; hardening the heart as it weakens the understanding.⁹³

Echoing Locke and others, and prefiguring Wordsworth's dislike of 'emulation' in education ('every way of exhibiting the acquirements of a child is injurious to its moral character'), Wollstonecraft condemns the use of rote learning:

How much time is lost in teaching them to recite what they do not understand? whilst, seated on benches all in their best array, the mammas listen with astonishment to the parrot-like prattle. [...] Such exhibitions only

⁹² Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and A Vindication of the Rights of Man*, ed. by Janet Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), Introduction, p. xx. Anna Barbauld pointed out to Maria Edgeworth in 1803 that, whatever the similarity of views: 'There is no band of union amongst literary women [...] Mrs Hannah More would not write along with you or me, and we should probably hesitate at joining Mrs Hays or, if she was living, Mrs Godwin [Mary Wollstonecraft]'. Quoted in Felicity James, 'Lucy Aikin and the legacies of Dissent', in *Religious Dissent and the Aikin-Barbauld Circle, 1740-1860*, 183-204 (pp. 194-95). Mrs [Mary] Hays was a friend of Mary Wollstonecraft from a Dissenting background who, as well as writing controversial novels, 'argued consistently against the disadvantages built into female education'. See 'Hays, Mary (1759-1843)' by Marilyn L. Brooks in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/37525>> [Accessed 2 April 2018].

⁹³ Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication*, p. 242.

serve to strike the spreading fibres of vanity through the whole mind; for they neither teach children to speak fluently, nor behave gracefully.⁹⁴

Wollstonecraft suggests that 'common' private schools stunt 'the 'body, heart and understanding', firstly because parents in general look for the cheapest school, and secondly because the proprietors of such schools will always be tempted to take on more pupils than they can manage.⁹⁵ This, in turn, leads to cost cutting; one example given by Wollstonecraft is that of a school where the boys were not allowed to stray from a narrow gravel walk on to the lawns; the master 'sometimes permitted sheep to be turned in to crop the untrodden grass.'⁹⁶

Wollstonecraft's proposed solution was for 'day schools [...] established by government, in which boys and girls might be educated together. The school for the younger children, from five to nine years of age, ought to be absolutely free and open to all classes.'⁹⁷ Repeating the arguments of Comenius, Milton, Locke and Rousseau, Wollstonecraft advocates as much fresh air and exercise as possible. Whilst some studies, such as botany, could be conducted outside the classroom, they should 'never encroach on gymnastic plays in the open air' and children should not sit at their desks for more than an hour at a time.⁹⁸ After the age of nine, boys and girls destined for trades should be educated separately from more intellectually able and richer pupils, who would proceed to more advanced studies. For 'young people of

⁹⁴ Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication*, p. 247. For Wordsworth's criticism of 'emulation' in education, see Chapter two.

⁹⁵ Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication*, p. 247.

⁹⁶ Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication*, p. 248, n1.

⁹⁷ Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication*, p. 252.

⁹⁸ Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication*, p. 252.

superior abilities, or fortune' a wide curriculum is suggested: 'the dead and living languages, the elements of science [...] history and politics', but literature is mentioned almost as an afterthought, Wollstonecraft stating only that it 'would not be excluded.'⁹⁹ Richardson suggests that Wollstonecraft's proposed 'segregation of older children into vocational and academic tracks reveals the limits to her vision of social change.'¹⁰⁰ This, however, indicates that Richardson has fallen into the very trap he cautions others against; that of 'imposing retrospectively a modern view of education on to writers with entirely different value systems'.

In *A Vindication* Wollstonecraft takes issue with contemporary attitudes to the education of women, including those derived from the ideas of Rousseau:

[A]ll the writers who have written on the subject of female education [...] have contributed to render women more artificial, weak characters, than they would otherwise have been; and, consequently, more useless members of society. [...] [M]y objection extends to the whole purport of those books, which tend, in my opinion, to degrade one half of the human species, and render women pleasing at the expence [sic] of every solid virtue.¹⁰¹

Wollstonecraft objected particularly to Rousseau's belief, expounded in *Emile*, that men and women are fundamentally unequal, and that women's main duty is to make themselves 'agreeable' to men. She attributes his attitude to the upbringing of children in France where 'At the age of ten or eleven; nay, often much sooner, girls began to coquet, and talked, unproved, of establishing themselves in the world by

⁹⁹ Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication*, p. 252.

¹⁰⁰ Richardson, p. 178.

¹⁰¹ Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication*, p. 87.

marriage.’¹⁰² The result of this precocious attitude was that girls needed the ‘constant and severe restraint [...] of decorum.’ Wollstonecraft suggests that, instead, girls should be better educated from the outset, so as to ‘give their activity of minds a wider range’, enabling ‘nobler passions and motives [to] govern their appetites and sentiments.’ Rousseau, she concludes, ‘denies woman reason, shuts her out from knowledge, and turns her aside from truth.’¹⁰³ As discussed below, Hannah More, arguing from a conservative rather than a radical perspective, also urged women to strengthen their minds, but in More’s view the majority of women would always remain intellectually inferior to men.¹⁰⁴

Maria Edgeworth’s *Practical Education* (1798)

Following Locke’s example, Maria Edgeworth’s influential *Practical Education* (1798) as its title suggests, stresses the importance of education as a means rather than an end. As Susan Manly points out, the title was intended as a direct response to Rousseau’s Preface to *Emile*, where he declines to give practical advice: ‘People are always asking me to make *practical* suggestions. You might as well ask me to suggest what people are doing already.’¹⁰⁵ Edgeworth, by contrast, sets out a programme of education that was, in Susan Manly’s words, ‘both practicable and quietly revolutionary, something that attentive early readers might have spotted in the many allusions to radical writers and thinkers in the pages of *Practical Education*.’¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication*, p. 154.

¹⁰³ Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication*, p. 87.

¹⁰⁴ See Franklin, pp. 23-24.

¹⁰⁵ Maria Edgeworth, *Novels and Selected Works XI, Practical Education*, ed. by Susan Manly (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003), Introduction, p. x; Rousseau, *Emile*, p. 34.

¹⁰⁶ Maria Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, Introduction, p. x.

One of Edgeworth's stated aims in *Practical Education* was to encourage parents to pay attention to the 'unpretentious, unaffected utterances of children, and of seeking to develop their capacity to reason for themselves, by guiding them towards an awareness of the meaning of the words they use and hear used about them in daily life.' Echoing Milton and Locke, Edgeworth criticized the existing system of Classical education in which 'after having spent eight hours a day "in durance vile", by the influence of bodily fear, or by the infliction of bodily punishment, a regiment of boys may be drilled [...] into what are called scholars.' Can it be necessary, Edgeworth asks, for children 'to spend so many years, so many of the best years of life, in toil and misery?'¹⁰⁷ Edgeworth suggests that the first step in rectifying this is for parents to satisfy their children's early curiosity about the origin of words and language, and thus demystify grammar. She recommends John Horne Tooke's *Epea Pteroenta, or The Diversions of Purley* (1786-1805) as a guide for parents about how grammar works, and expresses the wish that 'Mr Horne Tooke would have the philanthropic patience to write an elementary work in a *simple style*, unfolding his grammatical discoveries to the rising generation.'¹⁰⁸ Edgeworth saw two advantages in such an approach. Firstly, it would make learning easier and more enjoyable, and secondly, it would avoid the dangerous separation of word from

¹⁰⁷ Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, pp. 225-26.

¹⁰⁸ Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, pp. 233-34. The reference to Tooke would probably not have gone unnoticed by conservative critics of Edgeworth. John Horne Tooke was a radical writer and philologist. He was tried for high treason in 1794 but, after eloquently conducting his own defence, was acquitted after the jury had deliberated for only two minutes. See 'Tooke, John Horne (1736-1812)' by Michael T. Davies in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/27545>> [Accessed 5 January 2017] Hazlitt drew on Tooke's ideas in his attack on the use of arcane language by authority figures; see Chapter four.

object which she, along with many other writers on education, saw as an inevitable consequence of rote learning.

Whilst recognizing that 'Rousseau's eloquence and Locke's reasoning' had 'exploded the system of lecturing children upon morality; of giving them precepts which they do not understand, and cannot apply', Edgeworth took issue with Rousseau's advocacy of 'pious frauds'. In Edgeworth's words, Rousseau was suggesting that by parents and teachers 'teach[ing] truth by falsehoods' pupils were somehow to be 'duped, surprised, and cheated, into virtue.'¹⁰⁹ In this respect, Edgeworth's ideas aligned closely with those of Coleridge, who, as discussed in Chapter three, saw an unwavering adherence to truth as a fundamental principle of education.

Edgeworth deprecated the reading of romantic stories as likely to raise unrealistic expectations in young people, and possibly render them unfit for useful work. In her words, 'sentimental stories, and books of mere entertainment' should be sparingly used, as:

This species of reading cultivates what is called the heart prematurely, lowers the tone of the mind, and induces indifference for those common pleasures and occupations, which, however trivial in themselves, constitute by far the greatest portion of our daily happiness.¹¹⁰

As indicated above, Rousseau had recommended *Robinson Crusoe* as the only book suitable for young children. Edgeworth, however, went further, advising caution even in the reading of 'voyages and travels [such as] Robinson Crusoe, Gulliver and

¹⁰⁹ Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, p. 114.

¹¹⁰ Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, p. 194.

The Three Russian Sailors, who were cast away upon the shores of Norway', warning that, apart from those who are 'intended for a sea faring life, or for the army', such books would tend to unfit boys for 'the patient drudgery of a trade [or] the laborious mental exertions requisite to prepare him for a profession.'¹¹¹ As an alternative to romantic novels and adventure stories, Edgeworth proposed the study of natural history as 'particularly suited for children; it cultivates their talents for observation, applies it to objects within their reach [...] which are every day interesting to them.'¹¹² For younger children Edgeworth especially recommended 'Mrs Barbauld's Lessons; they are by far the best books of the kind that have ever appeared.'¹¹³

Edgeworth, unlike Locke, favoured school-based education over home tuition, particularly for boys. She suggests in *Practical Education* that parents who were ambitious for their sons should avoid sending them to small schools, particularly those near home, as:

Small schools are apt to be filled with persons of nearly the same stations [...], from this circumstance they contribute to perpetuate uncouth antiquated idioms, and many of those obscure prejudices which cloud the intellect in the future business of life.¹¹⁴

By contrast, education at a large public school would 'efface this rusticity and correct the faults of provincial dialect; in this point of view they are highly advantageous.'¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, p. 194.

¹¹² Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, p. 194.

¹¹³ Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, p. 195.

¹¹⁴ Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, pp. 284-85.

¹¹⁵ Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, p. 284.

With regard to universities, Edgeworth, citing the criticisms of Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), and Edward Gibbon in his *Memoirs of My Life and Writings* (1796), decries the universities' slavish adherence to Classical literature: 'May not their splendid halls echo with other sounds than the exploded metaphysics of the schools? and may not other learning be as much rewarded and esteemed as pure *latinity*?'¹¹⁶

Sarah Trimmer gave a mixed review of *Practical Education* in her influential journal *The Guardian of Education* (1802-06). Whilst endorsing the advice in *Practical Education* on the management and discipline of children, and the method advocated by Edgeworth of teaching through conversation, Trimmer strongly deprecated the lack of specific advice on religious education. Edgeworth, attempting to clear herself of the accusation of 'laying down a system of Education, founded upon Morality, exclusive of Religion', argued in *Practical Education* that 'children usually learn the religion of their parents; they attend public worship, and both at home and at school they read the Bible and various religious Books.'¹¹⁷ To Trimmer, however, the silence about religion in *Practical Education* indicated an ominous tendency towards Godlessness.

John Wilson Croker went further than Trimmer in his review of the third edition of the book in *The Quarterly Review*: 'A veneration for an unknown cause! A submission to inscrutable decrees! Morality, generosity, temper, and good manners! These constitute Mr Edgeworth's notion of religion. [...] Why is there no mention of

¹¹⁶ Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, p. 292.

¹¹⁷ Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, Introduction, p. xiv. *The Guardian of Education* was a periodical edited by Trimmer, which ran from June 1802 until September 1806. It was devoted almost entirely to reviews of children's books and books on education.

God, of confidence in a saviour, of hopes of futurity?’¹¹⁸ Manly suggests that the silence on religion in *Practical Education* was a deliberate, pragmatic decision by Edgeworth, who, living in Ireland and thus being aware of the potentially disastrous consequences of sectarian differences, did not wish to be seen to favour one religious denomination over others.¹¹⁹ Although the accusations of irreligion probably damaged the book’s reputation in Britain, *Practical Education* proved hugely popular in France, Switzerland and America.¹²⁰ The book’s criticisms of existing methods of Classical education, in particular of rote learning and a consequent over-reliance on memory, as well as echoing those of Milton and Locke, prefigured the attacks on such methods by Coleridge and Hazlitt, as explored in Chapters three and four.

Hannah More’s *Strictures on Female Education* (1799)

As well as being a pioneer of the Mendip Schools movement, Hannah More wrote extensively on female education. Her *Strictures on Female Education* was written as a response to what she saw as misguided attempts to reform education wholesale, and, in particular, to calls for female equality. In a section aimed directly at the arguments of Mary Wollstonecraft, More wrote:

[T]he imposing term of *rights* has been produced to sanctify the claim of our female pretenders, with a view not only to rekindle in the minds of women a presumptuous vanity dishonourable to their sex, but produced with a view to

¹¹⁸ Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, Introduction, p. xvii. Although *Practical Education* is now recognised as having been written mainly by Maria Edgeworth, it was published under her father’s name.

¹¹⁹ Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, Introduction, p. xvii.

¹²⁰ Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, Introduction, p. xiv.

excite in their hearts an impious discontent with the post which God has assigned them in this world.¹²¹

In fact, as Janet Todd points out, there was considerable overlap between the views of the two women, not just in their unfavourable view of sentimental novels, but in their belief that women's inferior position was due mainly to defects in their education rather than to any innate inferiority. The opening words of More's Introduction to *Strictures* could indeed have been written by Wollstonecraft:

It is a singular injustice which is often exercised towards women, first to give them a very defective Education, and then to expect from them the most undeviating purity of conduct; - to train them in such a manner as shall lay them open to the most dangerous faults, and then to censure them for not proving faultless.¹²²

This similarity of views between the conservative More and the radical Wollstonecraft did not go unnoticed even by their contemporaries. Mary Berry, a correspondent of Horace Walpole, having read *Strictures* side by side with *A Vindication*, commented that 'it is amazing, or rather it is not amazing but impossible, they should do otherwise than agree on all the great points of female education. H. More will, I dare say, be very angry with me when she hears this, though I would lay a wager that she never read the book.'¹²³ Richardson suggests that, despite this apparent agreement between the two, More and Wollstonecraft actually had very different ideas about women's education and the role of women in

¹²¹ More, *Strictures*, p. 179.

¹²² More, *Strictures*, p. 121.

¹²³ Mary Berry, quoted in Stott, pp. 224-25.

society. He stresses More's focus on the need for self-restraint in women's education, and concludes that 'although the two have been juxtaposed as twin expressions of "female domestic heroism" [...] To collapse their positions on female education together [...] is to do justice to the thought of neither.'¹²⁴ However, as mentioned above, Wollstonecraft had also urged self-restraint, suggesting that women improve their minds by reading so as to enable 'nobler passions and motives [to] govern their appetites and sentiment.' Anne Stott suggests that, although More's criticism of Wollstonecraft and other, less radical feminists has led her to be categorised as anti-women, many contemporary women saw her as a role model, along with other conservative women writers such as Anna Barbauld, Sarah Trimmer and Anna Seward, and concludes that, whatever their political views, 'their lives and writings did much to bolster women's self-esteem.'¹²⁵

More was particularly concerned that foreign writers, especially German writers such as Schiller and Kotzebue whose 'swarms of publications [...] are daily issuing from the banks of the Danube', were undermining morality and religious faith, and making women discontented with their lot:

For this purpose not only novels and romances have been made the vehicles of vice and infidelity, but the same allurements have been held out to the women of our country, which was held out by the original tempter to our first parent – Knowledge. Listen to the precepts of the new German enlighteners,

¹²⁴ Richardson, p. 181.

¹²⁵ Stott, pp. 218-19.

and you will need no longer remain in that situation in which Providence has placed you!¹²⁶

More explicitly attacks Mary Wollstonecraft, 'a professed admirer and imitator of the German suicide Werther', for 'a direct vindication of adultery' in *The Wrongs of Woman*.¹²⁷ In More's words Wollstonecraft 'asserts [...] that adultery is justifiable, and that the restrictions placed upon it by the laws of England constitute part of the *wrongs of woman*.'¹²⁸

More categorises the new German writers as 'Vandals' and 'Goths' and contrasts them with writers of the 'old classic school'. She envisages those readers with purer tastes seeing:

[W]ith indignation and astonishment the Vandals once more overpowering the Greeks and Romans. They behold our minds, with a retrograde but rapid motion, hurried back to the reign of "chaos and old night", by wild and misshapen superstitions; in which, with the *consistency* which forms so striking a feature of the new philosophy, those who deny the immortality of the soul are the most eager to introduce the machinery of ghosts.¹²⁹

More's words here reflect her own literary background as a friend of Dr Johnson, who similarly championed the 'classical' values against what he saw as a regressive

¹²⁶ More, *Strictures*, p. 139.

¹²⁷ *Maria; or The Wrongs of Woman* (1798) is an unfinished novel by Wollstonecraft, published posthumously by William Godwin.

¹²⁸ More, *Strictures*, p. 140. The reference to an 'imitator of Werther' hints at Wollstonecraft's failed suicide attempt in 1795, following the end of her relationship with Gilbert Imlay. Werther is the protagonist of Goethe's novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), who kills himself in despair over his love for the wife of his best friend. William Godwin had compared Wollstonecraft to Werther in *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798).

¹²⁹ More, *Strictures*, p. 137.

fashion for traditional ballads. It is interesting that More equates the new German writers with qualities that would come to be associated with the Romantic school, and with Coleridge in particular. Coleridge, in his later, politically conservative years, associated himself with many of the views of More and Trimmer, particularly with regards to the role of the Church of England in the education of the lower classes, and turned a blind eye to their castigation of ghost and fairy stories which he was so quick to condemn in Maria Edgeworth. In the privacy of his *Notebooks*, however, he railed against their philistinism, as discussed in Chapter three.

As well as condemning the influence of 'Godless' continental writers, More raised objections to existing methods of female education, focusing on the obsession with female 'accomplishments' (for example, foreign languages, drawing, and music), which had spread from the leisured upper classes to what she termed 'the middle orders'. In More's opinion, middle-class women did not need such accomplishments, and their acquisition of practical knowledge had suffered accordingly. The end result was an 'abundant multiplication of superficial wives, and of incompetent and illiterate governesses.' More believed that women should learn useful skills, but also train their minds by reading 'strong meat' such as 'Watts's or Duncan's little book of Logic, some parts of Mr. Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding, and Bishop Butler's Analogy' instead of trashy novels. Such reading is 'useful as a habit and wholesome as an exercise', it 'serves to harden the mind for more trying conflicts; it lifts the reader from sensation to intellect; it abstracts her from the world and its vanities; it fixes a wandering spirit, and fortifies a weak one.'¹³⁰ A woman should, in More's opinion:

¹³⁰ More, *Strictures*, pp. 168-69

[P]ursue every kind of study which will teach her to elicit truth; which will lead her to be intent upon realities; will give precision to her ideas; will make an exact mind; every study which, instead of stimulating her sensibility, will chastise it; which will give her definite notions; will bring the imagination under dominion; will lead her to think, to compare, to combine, to methodise.¹³¹

In other words, although More is careful to avoid saying precisely this, the aim of such reading would be to make a woman think more like a (rational) man.

More's attacks on excessive female 'sensibility' form part of a wider reaction against what had come to be seen as the sentimentalising effects of the cultivation of sensibility earlier in the eighteenth century. (Thomas Day's life exemplifies the sometimes ludicrous effects of an excess of sensibility.) More's criticisms prefigure Jane Austen's critique of excessive sensibility in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), which Austen may have begun writing as early as 1795.¹³²

More described what she saw as the consequences of a 'defective Education' in fictional form in the moral tale *The Two Wealthy Farmers* (1795-7). Mr Bragwell, one of the two farmers of the title, allows his wife to spoil their two daughters by sending them to a boarding school, from which they return with:

[A] large portion of vanity grafted on their native ignorance. The vanity was added but the ignorance was not taken away. Of Religion they could not possibly learn any thing, since none was taught for at that place it was

¹³¹ More, *Strictures*, pp. 172-73.

¹³² Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. by Ros Ballaster (London, Penguin Books, 1995, reprinted 2004). Ballaster, in her Introduction (p. iv), states that Austen 'family tradition' records an early version of the novel being read out to the family in 1795.

considered as a part of education which belonged only to Charity Schools. Of knowledge they had got just enough to laugh at their fond parents' rustic manners and vulgar language, and just enough taste to despise and ridicule every girl who was not as vainly dressed as themselves.¹³³

The girls refuse to nurse their father when he is ill, cannot help with his accounts ('though they knew how to *spend* both Pounds, Shillings, and Pence, yet they did not know so well how to cast them up'), and scorn their mother's request to help with preparations for a dinner party, asking 'whether she had sent them to Boarding School to learn to cook.'¹³⁴

By contrast, the daughters of the other farmer, Mr Worthy, having been educated at home, have acquired useful skills, and are not too proud to help in the running of the house and the farm. In Mr Worthy's words:

One of the best lessons I have taught them is, to know themselves; and one proof that they have learned this lesson is, that they are not above any of the duties of their station. They read and write well, and when my eyes are bad they keep my accounts in a very pretty manner. [...] Though we don't wish them to do the laborious parts of the dairy work; yet they always assist their Mother in the management of it.¹³⁵

Bragwell then criticizes the books his daughters read from the circulating library as being completely divorced from reality:

¹³³ Hannah More, 'The Two Wealthy Farmers', in *Selected Writings of Hannah More* (pp. 76-120), p. 80.

¹³⁴ More, 'The Two Wealthy Farmers', p. 80.

¹³⁵ More, 'The Two Wealthy Farmers', p. 83. The concept of not educating poorer children, particularly girls, 'above their station' was a major theme in Wordsworth's later ideas about education; see Chapter two.

But in these books, (except here and there one, whom they make worse than Satan himself) every man and woman's child of them, are all wise, and witty, and generous, and rich, and handsome, and genteel. No body is middling, or good in one thing, and bad in another, like my live acquaintance. But tis all up to the skies, or down to the dirt. I had rather read Tom Hickathrift, or Jack the Giant Killer.¹³⁶

Farmer Worthy adds that such books are not only 'ridiculous, but 'wicked', because they 'give false views of human life', teaching contempt for 'humble and domestic duties; for industry, frugality, and retirement.' Still worse:

Crimes which would be considered as hanging matter at the Old Bailey, are here made to take the appearance of virtue, by being mixed with some wild flight of unnatural generosity. Those crying sins, ADULTERY, GAMING, DUELS and SELF-MURDER, are made so familiar, and the wickedness of them is so disguised, that even innocent girls get to lose their abhorrence, and to talk with complacency, *of things which should not be so much as named by them.*¹³⁷

Needless to say, Bragwell's two daughters marry unwisely. One runs off with 'a strolling player' and is disowned by Bragwell, the other marries a supposedly wealthy, but actually penniless, financier who eventually commits suicide and returns to live with her parents.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ More, 'The Two Wealthy Farmers', p. 86. Farmer Bragwell's preference for Jack the Giant Killer both echoes Dr Johnson's, and prefigures Coleridge's – see below, and Chapter three. 'Tom Hickathrift' is a character from East Anglian folklore, who, like Jack, is involved in a battle with a giant.

¹³⁷ More, 'The Two Wealthy Farmers', pp. 86-87.

¹³⁸ Higher up the social scale, the 'deficient education' of Sir Thomas Bertram's two daughters in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814) has similarly disastrous consequences.

Given these perceived dangers to female morals from ‘sentimental’ novels, More was particularly concerned about the proliferation of novel-reading amongst working-class young women, an appetite fed by the increasing popularity of circulating libraries. Such reading had spread not only to ‘milliners, mantua-makers, and other trades where numbers work together, but [...] are procured and greedily read in the wards of our Hospitals!’¹³⁹ More sees this phenomenon as an ‘awful hint’ that those who teach the poor to read should ‘not only take care to furnish them with principles that will lead them to abhor corrupt books’ but should also provide them with wholesome books that will ‘strengthen and confirm their principles.’ In a footnote, More makes it clear that her disapproval of ‘mischievous books’ should not be taken as implying that the poor should be kept in ignorance, as ignorance has its own dangers, but that their instruction and choice of reading must be carefully superintended and that ‘moral and religious books’ should be given to them as charitable gifts.¹⁴⁰

More’s own Cheap Repository Tracts, of which two million copies had been distributed by 1796, were aimed at providing such suitable reading for the poorer classes. At a time when few working-class people could afford to buy books, the Tracts and similar didactical and devotional literature formed for many years the basis of the reading material at most Charity schools. For example, the catalogue of 339 volumes in a Sunday School in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1815 included such

¹³⁹ More, *Strictures*, p. 171. ‘Hospitals’ in this context refers to orphanages rather than to medical institutions, as in ‘Christ’s Hospital’.

¹⁴⁰ More, *Strictures*, pp. 171-72&n. Interestingly, Wollstonecraft, in *A Vindication*, specifies ‘Milliners and mantua-makers’ as trades in which less intellectually able girls should be trained.

works as *The Religious Tradesman*, *Milk for Babes* (a catechism in verse), *Precious Remedies for Satan's Devices* and *Sighs from Hell*.¹⁴¹ The question of how the educated masses would use their newly-acquired reading skills would continue to interest, indeed obsess, educational reformers well into the nineteenth century, as discussed in Chapters five and six.

Fairy stories and ghost stories

Fairy stories and ghost stories were a particularly contentious issue for eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writers on education. In *Some Thoughts* Locke had cautioned that parents should aim to protect children's minds from impressions of:

Sprites and Goblins, or any fearful Apprehensions in the dark. This [they] will be in danger of from the indiscretion of Servants, whose usual Method it is to awe Children, and keep them in subjection, by telling them of *Raw-Head* and *Bloody Bones*, and other such Names, as carry with them the Idea's [sic] of something terrible and hurtful, which they have reason to be afraid of, when alone, especially in the dark.¹⁴²

Such 'Bug-bear Thoughts' would, Locke suggests, sink deeply into children's minds, 'frequently haunt them with strange Visions', and make them 'afraid of their Shadows and Darkness' for the rest of their lives.¹⁴³ Charles Lamb's vivid account in *Essays of Elia* (1823) of the night terrors brought on by seeing the picture of the Witch of Endor in his father's copy of Thomas Stackhouse's *History of the Bible*

¹⁴¹ Frank Smith, *A History of English Elementary Education* (London: University of London Press, 1931), pp. 66-67.

¹⁴² Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, p. 196.

¹⁴³ Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, p. 197.

(1742-4) dramatically illustrates Locke's point. In Elia's words: '[T]o [the] picture of the Witch raising up Samuel – (O that old man covered up with a mantle!) I owe – not my midnight terrors [...] – but the shape and manner of their visitation [...] a hag that nightly sate upon my pillow.'¹⁴⁴ Moreover, in Locke's view, even if children were, in later life, able to outgrow such superstitious fears, they might end up by rejecting all ideas of the supernatural, including those relating to the Christian faith, and thus 'throw away the thoughts of all *Spirits* together, and so run into the other but worse extream [sic]'.¹⁴⁵ Partly for this reason, Locke cautioned against allowing young children to read the Bible unsupervised, and suggested instead using Aesop's fables, and simplified Bible stories, as means of illustrating moral lessons.¹⁴⁶

In her preface to *The Parent's Assistant* (1796), Edgeworth, who, as discussed above, borrowed many ideas from Locke, also condemned fairy stories as dangerous for younger children's imaginations, wasting their time and filling their minds with 'fantastic visions'. Instead, she suggested that young children should read simple 'improving' stories such as Anne Barbauld's *Lessons for Children, from Two to Three Years Old* (1778). Earlier in the century, Dr Johnson had argued precisely the opposite, believing that 'Endeavouring to make children prematurely wise' was 'useless labour. [...] Too much is expected of precocity, and too little performed.' He thought it better to 'gratify curiosity with wonders than to attempt planting

¹⁴⁴ Charles Lamb, 'Witches, and Other Night-Fears', *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. by E. V. Lucas (London: Methuen & Co., 1903), II, 65-70 (p. 67).

¹⁴⁵ Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, p. 246.

¹⁴⁶ Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, pp. 212-13.

truths.’¹⁴⁷ In a conversation with Hesther Piozzi about children’s books, he commented that: ‘Babies do not want [...] to hear about babies; they like to be told about giants and castles, and of somewhat which can stretch and stimulate their little minds.’ When Mrs Piozzi pointed out the high sales of books such as *Tommy Prudent* and *Goody Two Shoes*, Dr Johnson replied: ‘Remember always [...] that the parents *buy* the books, and that the children never read them.’¹⁴⁸

By 1798, when *Practical Education* was published, Maria Edgeworth could write that fairy stories were ‘not now much read’ and by 1802, Lamb was complaining to Coleridge that what he described as ‘Mrs Barbauld’s stuff’ had ‘banished all the old classics out of the nursery’, claiming that Mary Lamb had been unable to find any editions of traditional fairy stories to read to the children whom she taught.¹⁴⁹ Sarah Trimmer welcomed this change, writing in *The Guardian of Education* (1803):

Though we well remember the interest with which [...] we read, or listened to the history of ‘*Little Red Riding Hood*’ and ‘*Blue Beard*’, etc. we do not wish to have such sensations awakened in the hearts of our grandchildren [...] for the terrific images, which tales of this nature present to the imagination, usually

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. by R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 662.

¹⁴⁸ Hesther Lynch Piozzi, *Anecdotes of the late Samuel Johnson, LL.D., during the last twenty years of his Life*, ed. by S. C. Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925), p. 14. *Tommy Prudent* and *Goody Two Shoes* (authors unknown) were ‘improving’ stories for children, published by John Newbery in the 1760s.

¹⁴⁹ Quoted in Pickering, p. 150.

make deep impressions, and injure the tender minds of children, by exciting unreasonable and groundless fears.¹⁵⁰

This unresolved tension between the need to protect the ‘tender minds’ of children from ‘terrific images’, and the wish to ‘gratify their curiosity with wonders’ was a particular preoccupation of Coleridge, as discussed in Chapter three. There is also a curious contradiction in the antagonistic view of fairy tales of conservative writers such as More and Trimmer, and their championing by Samuel Johnson and Wordsworth as a traditional, and thus conservative, alternative to modern, ‘rational’ educational texts for young children.¹⁵¹

Home tuition versus school education

As indicated above, another long-standing debate amongst educational reformers was whether home education was to be preferred to school education. Locke argued that education away from home would inevitably result in damage to children’s morals and a coarsening of their manners. Acknowledging that home education was not without its disadvantages, Locke wonders:

How any one’s being put into a mixed Herd of unruly Boys, and there learning to wrangle at Trap, or rook at Span-Farthing, fits him for civil Conversation, or Business, I do not see. And what Qualities are ordinarily to be got from

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in Pickering, pp. 43-44. As Nicholas Tucker points out, the debate over the desirability or otherwise of fairy stories for young children continued into the twentieth century. See Tucker, p. 67.

¹⁵¹ See, for example, Richardson, pp. 121-27. This tension is also reflected in the simultaneous adoption of the Gothic form of architecture by both radical and conservative thinkers earlier in the eighteenth century. For radicals, the Gothic form represented the freedom from central Roman authority enjoyed by the original Goths, whilst for conservatives, it symbolised a rejection of the cold classicism and agnosticism of rational thinkers. See, for example, David Coffin, *The English Garden: Meditation and Memorial* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 111-12, for a discussion of the symbolic use of the Gothic style in garden buildings by both Whig and Tory landowners in the eighteenth century.

such a Troop of Play-fellows, as Schools usually assemble from Parents of all kinds, that a Father should so much covet, is hard to divine.¹⁵²

Locke goes on to argue that a home tutor would, by contrast, give a boy 'a more genteel Carriage, more manly Thoughts, and a Sense of what is worthy and becoming, with a greater Proficiency in Learning into the Bargain.'¹⁵³ By definition, this of course meant that Locke's suggestions in *Some Thoughts* were directed exclusively at those upper- and upper-middle-class parents who could afford tutors.

For poorer children, especially those in urban areas, Locke advocated state-supervised 'working schools' from the age of three to fourteen, where children of both sexes would be taught useful skills such as spinning or knitting.¹⁵⁴ The purpose was as much social control as education; an avowed aim of such schools being to reduce the number of child beggars on the streets of London and other towns and cities. This 'social' motivation for education of the poor continued through the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century, in the activities of reformers such as Robert Raikes, a leading figure in the Sunday School movement, Sarah Trimmer, who set up several schools for poor children in Brentford, and Hannah More, whose 'Mendip schools' were amongst the first to provide free education for children of the poorest families. As discussed below, the provision of cheap or free education for children of poor families eventually became institutionalized, initially through the rival monitorial systems of Bell and Lancaster.

¹⁵² Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, p. 130.

¹⁵³ Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, p. 130.

¹⁵⁴ Barney, pp. 123-24.

Over the course of the eighteenth century the preference amongst upper-class parents gradually shifted away from home tuition towards education at a public or private school. By the middle of the century, the opposing views were more or less balanced, although opposition to public schools remained strong in some quarters, mainly because of the persistent belief that public schools bred immorality. The opposing views are discussed fictionally by Parson Adams and Joseph Andrews in Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (1742). Having listened to the melancholy story of a gentleman who has led a wicked life and ended up in a debtor's prison, Adams concludes: 'I have discovered the Cause of all the Misfortunes which befel him. A Public School, *Joseph*, was the Cause of all the Calamities which he afterwards suffered. Public Schools are the Nurseries of all Vice and Immorality.'¹⁵⁵ Joseph responds that, in the opinion of his late master, Sir Thomas Booby, 'a Boy taken from a Public School, and carried into the World, will learn more in one Year there, than one of a private Education will in five [...] great Schools are little Societies, where a Boy [...] may see [...] what he will afterwards find in the World at large.'¹⁵⁶ Adams contends that private schools are better, because boys can there be protected from the wickedness of the world. Anticipating the arguments in favour of a public school education later used by Maria Edgeworth, Joseph replies: 'I remember when I was in the Stable, if a young Horse was vicious in his Nature, no Correction would make him otherwise [...] if a Boy be of a mischievous wicked Inclination, no School, tho' ever so

¹⁵⁵ Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, ed. by Thomas Keymer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967, reprinted 1999), p. 200.

¹⁵⁶ Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, p. 200. This was also the argument used in favour of public schools by Dr Johnson: 'More is learned in publick than in private schools, from emulation; there is the collision of mind with mind, or the radiation of many minds pointing to one centre.' Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, p. 661.

private, will ever make him good.’¹⁵⁷ (This of course avoids the issue of whether a bad school would make a good boy bad).

Twenty years later, the educational approach advocated in Rousseau’s *Emile* was still predicated upon home teaching by an individual tutor. By the end of the century, however, Maria Edgeworth, as mentioned above, was arguing that, particularly for children of ‘persons of narrow fortune, or persons who have acquired wealth in business’, education at a public school was desirable, as it would ‘efface [...] rusticity and correct the faults of provincial dialect.’¹⁵⁸ In *The Two Wealthy Farmers*, More had identified two possible dangers from sending children away to school to ‘efface rusticity’ - that children thus educated would come to find their own parents ridiculous, and would moreover be unfitted for useful work.

Paul Langford demonstrates how the growth of the middle class resulted in a gradual change in parental choices in education over the course of the eighteenth century, with local grammar schools falling from favour, and more middle-class parents choosing to send their sons away from home to public or private schools.¹⁵⁹ As Langford points out, attendance at a fashionable public school enabled a middle-class boy to establish useful ‘connections’ with boys from wealthier, or aristocratic families, whereas at a grammar school, he would mix only with those from his own, or lower classes. In addition, many grammar schools had come to be seen as backward-looking and, by concentrating on the teaching of the Classics to the exclusion of almost everything else, unfitting boys for useful work. Humphry Repton

¹⁵⁷ Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, p. 201.

¹⁵⁸ Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, p. 284.

¹⁵⁹ Langford, pp. 83-84.

wrote of his removal from Norwich Grammar School at the age of twelve: 'My father thought proper to put a stopper in the vial of classic literature, having determined to make me a rich, rather than a learned man.'¹⁶⁰

The grammar schools, which for the most part still adhered to the Classics as the core of the curriculum (indeed some were prevented by the terms of their charters from teaching other subjects), thus suffered in two respects, losing boys whose parents intended them for a commercial career, and those whose parents sought to improve their sons' prospects through contact with their social superiors at public schools. Many grammar schools fell into decline and disrepute during this period. Brian Simon provides several examples, such as Leicester grammar school which had, by 1838, declined from teaching over 300 boys to one boarder and three day-boys. Corruption was also rife; Simon cites Berkhamstead school, where 'two clergymen - a father and son - exploited between them an annual revenue of £3,000 [about £250,000 in current value] belonging to the school; neither had done any teaching for years.'¹⁶¹ Bristol Grammar School, under one long-serving Headmaster, Charles Lee, gradually lost pupils to rival schools. Eventually the school had only one pupil, known locally as 'Lee's chick', who was kept on at the school so that Lee could retain what was in effect a sinecure position. The school then closed entirely for several years before re-opening under a revised Charter and a new Headmaster.¹⁶²

Edgeworth questioned Locke's view that a public school would invariably worsen a boy's character. She wrote in *Practical Education*:

¹⁶⁰ Langford, p. 81.

¹⁶¹ Simon, pp. 94-97.

¹⁶² See < <http://www.educationbase.co.uk/Bristol-Grammar-Lower-School-Bristol,CC0450> > [Accessed 12 March 2018].

Boys [...] do not come [to school] with fresh unprejudiced minds to commence their course of social education; they bring with them all the ideas and habits which they have already learned in their respective homes. [...] Habits of eight or nine years standing cannot be [...] destroyed; they will mix themselves imperceptibly with the new ideas that are planted in their minds.¹⁶³

Edgeworth concludes that, to 'careless observers', boys of nine years old, however educated, may appear alike in 'abilities, in temper, and in the promise of future character', but in the context of education at a large public school, after a few years the differences between them 'will be such as to strike every eye.'¹⁶⁴

The Dissenting Academies

In this period the grammar and public schools, and both English universities, were firmly under the control of the Church of England. Another educational trend from the end of the seventeenth century was the growth of schools to meet the needs of parents who wanted a non-Anglican education for their children. The Act of Uniformity (1662) had provided that 'Every Schoolmaster keeping any public or private school and every person instructing or teaching any youth in any house or private family as a tutor or School master' must sign a declaration that he would conform to the liturgy of the Church of England. Any teacher or prospective teacher was required to obtain a licence permitting him to teach from 'his respective archbishop, bishop or ordinary of the diocese'. Dissenters were also excluded from the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. This law effectively prevented anyone other than a practising member of the Church of England from teaching in orthodox

¹⁶³ Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, pp. 285-86.

¹⁶⁴ Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, p. 288.

schools. However, following a legal ruling in 1670 that, if a schoolmaster was the nominee of the founder or patron of a school, he could not be dismissed for teaching without a Bishop's licence, many displaced academics set up Dissenting schools and academies. It has been estimated that as many as one thousand such institutions were established between 1660 and 1730.¹⁶⁵

In the previous century Milton, in 'Of Education', had set out a template for an ideal academy:

First, to find out a spacious [sic] house and ground about it fit for an *Academy*, and big enough to lodge a hundred and fifty persons [...] all under the government of one, who shall be thought of desert sufficient, and ability either to doe [sic] all, or wisely to direct and oversee it done. This place should be at once both school and University.¹⁶⁶

In line with Milton's suggestion, many of the Dissenting Academies provided teaching up to undergraduate level, though none were empowered to award degrees. In contrast to the narrow curriculum of most grammar and public schools, the Academies provided a broad-based education, and some introduced the study of English literature as an academic subject. At Warrington Academy, for example, the subjects taught included languages, natural history, and belles-lettres in addition to Classics.¹⁶⁷ When Joseph Priestley joined the teaching staff at Warrington, he introduced 'lectures on history and general policy, laws and constitutions of England

¹⁶⁵ See Irene Parker, *Dissenting Academies in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), p. 50.

¹⁶⁶ Milton, 'Of Education', pp. 379-80.

¹⁶⁷ Parker, p. 108.

and on the history of England.’¹⁶⁸ At Kibworth School in Leicestershire, pupils had ‘a thorough grounding in classical and modern languages, including French and Italian, as well as the study of geography.’¹⁶⁹

For several decades of the eighteenth century, the Dissenting Academies were regarded as respectable institutions, providing a sound, broad-based education at a relatively low cost. Parents who belonged to the Church of England often sent their sons to Dissenting Academies in preference to grammar schools, many of which, as mentioned above, had entered a period of decline. Dissenters were at the forefront of intellectual developments, and many played key roles in the nascent Industrial Revolution. Moreover, their position in society was fairly secure. In William McCarthy’s words: ‘Dissenters, as long as they kept reasonably quiet, could enjoy cordial relations with churchmen and even courtiers – some of whom, up to 1790 at least, were quite liberal.’¹⁷⁰

Following the French Revolution and the ensuing Terror, however, the defenders of the monarchy and the Church of England came to see the Dissenting Academies as a potential threat to the stability of both Church and State, and as breeding grounds for radicals. These suspicions were confirmed by the enthusiastic reaction of Priestley and other leading Dissenters to the French Revolution. As Ian Inkster puts it: ‘During the 1790s, any existing continuum of Dissent was finally

¹⁶⁸ Parker, p. 116.

¹⁶⁹ Felicity James, ‘Religious Dissent and the Aikin-Barbault Circle, 1740-1860: an introduction’, in Felicity James and Ian Inkster (eds.) *Religious Dissent and the Aikin-Barbault Circle, 1740-1860*, pp. 1-27 (p. 12).

¹⁷⁰ William McCarthy, ‘How Dissent made Anna Letitia Barbault, and what she made of Dissent’ in Felicity James and Ian Inkster (eds.) *Religious Dissent and the Aikin-Barbault Circle, 1740-1860*, pp. 52-69 (p. 55).

severed by the varying responses to the French Revolution and its immediate aftermath. Many Unitarians, in particular, began to feel both socially isolated and culturally marginal.¹⁷¹ With the start of the Napoleonic Wars, suspicion gave way to outright hostility, and the Dissenting Academies went into a period of decline, as Anglican parents withdrew their sons, and some of the key teachers, including Priestley, fled Britain altogether in the face of persecution and mob violence. The establishment of University College London in 1826, which provided an alternative opportunity for tertiary education for Dissenters, removed a key *raison d'être* for the Academies.

The Bell/Lancaster Monitorial Systems

Although universal, compulsory elementary education in England and Wales had to await Forster's Education Act of 1870, a limited form of state-funded education began in the early years of the nineteenth century with subsidies to schools run on the rival monitorial systems of Bell and Lancaster. Both systems involved older pupils teaching younger ones, with minimal supervision by teachers. Such systems therefore enabled the education of large numbers of children at a relatively low cost, with obvious attractions for governments seeking to minimise expenditure.¹⁷² Although initially relations between the two men were cordial, a dispute gradually arose over which of them had originated the monitorial system.

¹⁷¹ Ian Inkster, "'Under the eye of the public': Arthur Aikin (1773-1854), the Dissenting mind and the character of English industrialization' in Felicity James and Ian Inkster (eds.) *Religious Dissent and the Aikin-Barbault Circle, 1740-1860*, pp. 126-155 (p. 138).

¹⁷² Joseph Lancaster claimed that the cost per pupil in his system amounted to less than £5 a year, and that a year would suffice to teach children the rudiments of reading, writing and arithmetic. See Joseph Lancaster, 'Improvements in Education' in *Seven Pamphlets of Joseph Lancaster*, ed. by Jeffrey Stern (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1995).

Whilst Bell and Lancaster remained personally aloof from the dispute, their proponents ensured that the matter remained contentious. The supporters of the rival systems were divided along sectarian lines, with Bell's system being favoured by Anglicans, and Lancaster's by both Dissenters and Utilitarian reformers such as James Mill and Jeremy Bentham.¹⁷³ As discussed in Chapters two and three, Wordsworth and Coleridge were drawn into this dispute and supported Bell, whilst Southey assisted Bell in publicising his ideas, was appointed as his executor in Bell's will, and eventually wrote Bell's biography.¹⁷⁴

Lancaster's system, under the auspices of the Royal Lancastrian Institution, later known as the British and Foreign School Society (1810), was the first to receive a state subsidy. The first Lancastrian school had been established in 1798 in Borough Road, Southwark, London, as a free elementary school with (eventually) around a thousand pupils. Lancaster formulated his ideas in *Improvements in Education* (1803), and his work began to attract the attention of wealthy patrons, including the Duke of Bedford. Lancaster was granted an audience by George III, who told him: 'It is my wish that every poor child in my dominions is taught to read the Holy Scriptures' (the King's words were later displayed in large letters in the schoolroom at Borough Road).¹⁷⁵ In *Improvements in Education*, Lancaster

¹⁷³ Jeremy Bentham's proposed 'Chrestomathic' school was to have been run on Lancastrian lines, and James Mill educated his children using an adapted form of the monitorial system, with his eldest son, John Stuart Mill, teaching his younger siblings.

¹⁷⁴ Southey died having written only the first volume of Bell's biography. The second and third volumes were written by Southey's son Cuthbert.

¹⁷⁵ See 'Lancaster, Joseph (1778–1838)', by G. F. Bartle, in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/15963>> [Accessed 5 January 2017].

acknowledged his debts to Bell: 'I ought not to conclude my account without acknowledging the obligations I lie under to Dr Bell, of the Male Asylum at Madras, who so nobly gave up his time and liberal salary, that he might perfect that institution, which flourished so greatly under his care.'¹⁷⁶

Initially, Lancaster's ideas seemed uncontroversial, even amongst supporters of the Church of England. Sarah Trimmer, writing in *The Guardian of Education* in 1803, described *Improvements in Education* as 'promising incalculable advantages' through its 'instruction in reading, writing, arithmetic and discipline', and, although taking issue with its exclusion of any reference to the doctrines of the Established Church, she extended her best wishes to Lancaster for the success of his plan. By 1805, however, Trimmer had come to view Lancaster's system as dangerous to the Church of England, writing to Bell that 'of all the plans that have appeared in this kingdom likely to supplant the Church, Mr Joseph Lancaster's seems to me the most formidable.'¹⁷⁷ She went on to claim that Lancaster had copied Bell's ideas, and stated that whilst, up to a point, Lancaster was 'an instrument of good', by disseminating Bell's ideas, 'as for his *central school* and his *organised plans to educate the whole body of the people without any regard for the religion of the nation*', she would 'do her utmost to check him.'¹⁷⁸ Despite Trimmer's opposition, Lancaster's techniques for mass teaching spread rapidly, and eventually some thirty thousand

¹⁷⁶ Joseph Lancaster, *Improvements in Education*, quoted in Rev. Charles Cuthbert Southey, *The Life of the Rev. Andrew Bell* (London: John Murray, 1844), Vol II, p.122.

¹⁷⁷ Sarah Trimmer to Andrew Bell, in Cuthbert Southey, *The Life of the Rev. Andrew Bell*, Vol II, p. 135.

¹⁷⁸ Sarah Trimmer to Andrew Bell, in Cuthbert Southey, *The Life of the Rev. Andrew Bell*, Vol II, p. 136.

pupils were being taught in ninety-five Lancastrian schools across England and Wales.

Andrew Bell began his experiments at an asylum for the orphaned and illegitimate children of British soldiers in Madras from around 1789. He initially outlined his ideas in *An Experiment in Education Made At The Male Asylum of Madras. Suggesting A System By Which A School or Family May Teach Itself Under the Superintendence Of The Master Or Parent* (1797), but did not reach a wide audience until the publication of *An analysis of the experiment in education, made at Egmore, near Madras* (1807), written with the assistance of Robert Southey. (It was this latter work which caught the attention of Coleridge and Wordsworth; see Chapters two and three). After Bell's ideas had been adopted by several schools, including most notably the preparatory school at Christ's Hospital, the National Society for the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Christian Church was established in 1811 to set up schools using Bell's system in Britain and the colonies, and to encourage existing schools to adopt his methods. The 'Christian Church' in this context refers exclusively to the Church of England, and although Lancaster's system enjoyed Royal patronage, Bell had a considerable advantage over Lancaster, in that the Church of England had control over parish schools in every part of England and Wales. Lancaster, by contrast, was obliged to establish entirely new schools to implement his system.

Besides the sectarian differences, the two systems used very different approaches to rewards and punishments. Though both in theory eschewed the use of beatings (and Lancaster's Quaker beliefs meant that he was unwilling to inflict pain), Lancaster's system involved various 'shaming' punishments, such as loading misbehaving children with chains, or hanging placards around their necks, combined

with a complicated system of rewards for good behaviour and academic performance. The punishments, as explained in Chapter three, drew particular scorn from Coleridge, who had bitter memories of similar punishments from his own schooldays. Although Southey had been expelled from Westminster School for writing a pamphlet opposing corporal punishment, he wrote that he would 'rather be beaten' than endure the types of punishment in the Lancastrian system. Southey was equally critical of the system of rewards, which he saw as fostering jealousy amongst pupils; tellingly, he associated it with a Utilitarian philosophy: 'Mr Lancaster's system of rewards is founded upon the system of those base-minded sophists who make selfishness the spring of all our actions; it [...] establishes it as a principle of education.'¹⁷⁹ Bell's system, by contrast, devolved discipline almost entirely to the pupils, and Bell claimed that beatings and rewards were equally unnecessary.

Following the Reform Act of 1832, Parliament voted to allocate £20,000 per annum of public funding for elementary education, to be shared between the Bell and Lancaster systems in proportion to the funds they themselves were able to raise. The grant rose as new schools were created, reaching £100,000 by 1846, by which time the bulk of the funding went to the National Society, as by then the majority of elementary schools were Anglican.¹⁸⁰ The value of the education provided by both types of 'monitorial' systems was limited, relying as it did on the strength of pupils'

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in David M. Craig, *Robert Southey and Romantic Apostasy: Political Argument in Britain, 1780-1840* (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2007), p. 98. Craig argues that Southey's support for Bell's system was pragmatic rather than ideological; the existing parochial school system being, in Southey's view, the most efficient means of providing elementary education across the country.

¹⁸⁰ See Boyd Hilton, pp. 536-37.

memory. As Mary Hilton writes of the Lancastrian system: 'in many cases the children often did no more than learn single words on cards and remained unable to read prose.'¹⁸¹ As discussed in Chapter six, contemporary critics, such as George Biber, suggested that children taught under monitorial systems were prevented from understanding what they were taught.

Richardson explores the apparent contradiction between Wordsworth and Coleridge's enthusiastic support for Bell's mechanistic monitorial system, and their Romantic conception of the child needing space to exercise his or her capacity for imagination and speculation. Both writers were opposed to the 'controlling' aspects of Utilitarian education, which deliberately left no scope for the imagination. As Richardson puts it: 'Rather than seeking to infiltrate the child's mind, Wordsworth and Coleridge propose that the child be left by itself to confront gaps and limitations in its habitual thinking process.'¹⁸² This however glosses over the differences between the two writer's ideas. Allowing children scope for free time was particularly important for Wordsworth, who had in any case a fundamental mistrust of 'book-learning'. Coleridge, by contrast, had reservations about a child having too much free time; his experiences at Christ's Hospital had led him to believe that for most children this would inevitably result in boredom and misbehaviour. Bell's system ensured that every minute of a child's time at school was accounted for, and Coleridge, and later De Quincey, saw this as one of its major strengths.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Mary Hilton, p. 175.

¹⁸² Richardson, p. 57.

¹⁸³ Christ's Hospital was one of the first major public schools to adopt Bell's methods, at its preparatory school in Hertford.

Richardson also suggests that the 'controlling' nature of Bell's system was attractive to Wordsworth and Coleridge because of their growing fears of a radicalised working class, which could, by systems such as Bell's, be trained to accept its subservient role. Against this, I will argue that the particular attraction of Bell's system to both writers was instead its claim to place the individual child at the centre of education and to tailor teaching to his or her own abilities. For Wordsworth, it had the additional advantage of encouraging cooperation rather than competition between pupils. Wordsworth's disillusion with Bell's system was at least partly due to the refusal by Charterhouse school, at that time run on Bell's system, to accept his elder son John, who was struggling with traditional teaching methods. Despite this, he also sent his younger son Willy to schools run on monitorial lines, with unfortunate results.

Both monitorial systems gradually fell out of favour during the nineteenth century, as teaching became more professionalized.

Chapter Two: Wordsworth

In this chapter, I focus on Wordsworth's educational experiences at Hawkshead Grammar School and Cambridge, and compare these experiences to those of his contemporaries. I also examine to what extent the teaching Wordsworth received reflected current trends in educational theory and practice, what sort of education Wordsworth subsequently chose for his two sons and daughter, and how his educational theories, as revealed in letters and the one public speech he made, evolved and changed over time.

Wordsworth's early education

Wordsworth's early education was provided by his father, who encouraged him to commit to memory large portions of literature, particularly Milton, Spenser and Shakespeare, and allowed him free access to his library. There Wordsworth read 'all Fielding's works, *Don Quixote*, *Gil Blas*, and any part of Swift's works that I liked; *Gulliver's Travels*, and the *Tale of the Tub*, being much to my taste.'¹⁸⁴ When his mother died in 1778, Wordsworth, then aged eight, was sent to Hawkshead Free Grammar School, which he attended until 1787. Hawkshead, founded in 1585, was a small school, housed in a single two-storey building, with only a Headmaster and four other teachers during Wordsworth's time there. The name 'Free Grammar School' was a slight misnomer; local boys were indeed educated free of charge, but those from outside the immediate locality were charged an admission fee of two guineas and an annual charge of three guineas, known as 'cockpenny'. Writing and arithmetic were regarded as extras and had to be paid for separately.¹⁸⁵ The school

¹⁸⁴ Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 28.

¹⁸⁵ Cowper, pp. 499-501.

day was long, from six to eleven in the morning, and from one to five in the afternoon.¹⁸⁶

Hawkshead was unusual in that, unlike most other grammar schools at the time, which focused narrowly on Classical literature, it provided a wide and various curriculum, covering the Classics, mathematics, physics and English literature. In this respect, the School bore a close resemblance to the various Dissenting Academies which flourished around this time. John Williams observes that, at the time the School was forced to close, early in the twentieth century, it was criticised by a local writer as having been ‘a cradle of non-conformity’ and political radicalism, an accusation more usually levelled at the Dissenting Academies.¹⁸⁷ However, Williams’ source, Henry Swainson Cowper, does not appear to me to make such a claim. He clearly attributes the school’s failure to its inability to adapt to changing educational needs during the nineteenth century (as was the case with many grammar schools), and to serious financial mismanagement throughout the school’s existence.¹⁸⁸ The school did have strong links with the Dissenting Academies, sending many pupils on to the Academies at Warrington, Kendal and Manchester, which offered university-level education to those debarred from attending Oxford or Cambridge for religious reasons. Whatever the causes, the school, like many grammar schools, gradually declined over the course of the nineteenth century, from over one hundred pupils in

¹⁸⁶ T. W. Thompson, p. 104.

¹⁸⁷ John Williams, *William Wordsworth, a Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p. 31.

¹⁸⁸ Cowper, pp. 494-500. Financial mismanagement was also a contributory factor in the failure of some of the Dissenting Academies, such as Hackney New College; see Chapters one and four.

1785 to forty in 1820. By 1856, only one boy was being taught Latin, and the school finally closed in 1904.¹⁸⁹

During Wordsworth's time at Hawkshead, the school had a very comprehensive library, built up by two Headmasters, William Taylor and Thomas Bowman, from which the pupils were able to borrow freely, and to which the boys on leaving were obliged to donate at least one book. Thomas Bowman outlined in 1789, shortly after Wordsworth had left, how he would like to see the school's library developed:

I have long wished that our present Library might be extended; so as to take in all the English Classics, History, Topography, Chronology, Biography, Travels, Descriptions of Manners, Customs and Ceremonies, Books of Taste, Literature and Criticism, Natural Philosophy in all its Branches, Ethics, Natural History, elementary Treatises on popular Sciences, and all approved works on all generally interesting subjects whatever.¹⁹⁰

By 1899, the library amounted to over a thousand volumes, mostly on open shelves, but by this time, as Cowper reported, 'the entire collection is [...] suffering extremely from damp.'¹⁹¹

The library provided Wordsworth with access to the works of many contemporary and recent English writers. Wordsworth recalled that it was through Bowman and the school library that he first became acquainted with the works of Langhorne, Beattie, Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), Crabbe,

¹⁸⁹ Cowper, p. 501.

¹⁹⁰ Williams, p. 26.

¹⁹¹ Cowper, p. 502.

Charlotte Smith, and Joseph and Thomas Warton.¹⁹² Percy's *Reliques* in particular were of fundamental importance in the development of literary tastes in the latter part of the eighteenth century, fostering a revival of interest in the ballad, and in English as opposed to Classical modes of poetry. In the 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth quotes four lines from 'The Babes in the Wood', one of the poems in the *Reliques*, as an example of how effective simple language, which 'in no respect differ[s] from the most unimpassioned conversation' can be in a poetical context:

These pretty Babes with hand in hand
Went wandering up and down
But never more they saw the Man
Approaching from the Town.¹⁹³

Wordsworth's claimed that the objections of Dr Johnson, amongst others, to the use of such simple language in poetry was misplaced. What was vital was that poetry should 'excite thought or feeling in the Reader.' If 'simple verses' failed to do this they were, by definition, not poetry.¹⁹⁴

Pupils at Hawkshead were encouraged to write as well as to read poetry. Wordsworth's earliest poems date from 1784, when he was fourteen, the age at which, according to his 1843 note to 'An Evening Walk', 'I date [...] my consciousness of the infinite variety of natural appearances which had been unnoticed by the poets

¹⁹² Gill, p. 29.

¹⁹³ Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802), in *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by Michael Mason (London: Longman, 1992), pp. 55-87 (p. 85).

¹⁹⁴ Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802), p. 85.

of any age or country, so far as I was acquainted with them.'¹⁹⁵ This was also the age at which the then Headmaster of Hawkshead, William Taylor, required his pupils to compose verses themselves.¹⁹⁶

The Classics formed the basis of the curriculum at Hawkshead, as was then the case at all grammar schools, but at Hawkshead they were not taught by rote learning or set exercises in verse composition, and Wordsworth consequently became strongly attached to Classical authors, recollecting that:

Before I read Virgil, I was so strongly attached to Ovid, whose *Metamorphoses* I read at school, that I was quite in a passion whenever I found him, in books of criticism, placed below Virgil. As to Homer, I was never weary of travelling over the scenes through which he led me. Classical literature affected me by its own beauty.¹⁹⁷

As Hazlitt did with his son, Wordsworth later tried, with varying degrees of success, to instil a love of the Classics in his children.

Wordsworth attended Hawkshead School as a day boy, lodging, along with his brothers John and Richard, with a local widow, Ann Tyson, at a charge of six guineas for each half-yearly term of twenty-one weeks.¹⁹⁸ This was the normal arrangement for non-local boys, as there was only limited accommodation at the school itself. It meant that during his schooldays Wordsworth was free from both parental control and the oppressive surroundings of a boarding school. It is clear that Coleridge in

¹⁹⁵ Gill, p. 30.

¹⁹⁶ Gill, p. 31.

¹⁹⁷ Gill, p. 27.

¹⁹⁸ Thompson, p. 86.

particular, ‘in city pent’ during his schooldays at Christ’s Hospital, envied the amount of freedom enjoyed by Wordsworth as a child.

Wordsworth at Cambridge

As well as sending boys to the Dissenting Academies, Hawkshead Grammar School was what would now be termed a ‘feeder school’ for St John’s College Cambridge, to which Wordsworth went up as an undergraduate in 1787. Edwin Sandys, the founder of the School, had attended St John’s, and the link between the two institutions had persisted to Wordsworth’s time.¹⁹⁹ Although both Oxford and Cambridge Universities were at this time widely criticized as being outmoded and providing teaching well below the standard of the leading continental and Scottish universities, St John’s was something of an exception, in terms of both its academic reputation and its teaching priorities. A previous Master of the College, William Powell, had introduced a system unique to St John’s of twice-yearly compulsory examinations in Classics, Euclid, algebra, and Christian apologetics, and the College had expanded in numbers considerably during his Mastership.²⁰⁰

Hawkshead, staffed mainly by Cambridge graduates, deliberately gave its more academically gifted boys a solid grounding in these subjects, particularly in Euclidian geometry. As Ben Ross Schneider points out, during Wordsworth’s time at Cambridge, two Hawkshead boys achieved first and second Wrangler, whilst four others were amongst the top ten Wranglers. (At Cambridge, a Wrangler is a person placed in the first class of the mathematical tripos.) Wordsworth himself later claimed that the education received at Hawkshead gave him ‘a full twelve-month’s

¹⁹⁹ Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: A Biography*, Vol. I, p. 26 n1.

²⁰⁰ Moorman, Vol. I, p. 89.

start of the freshmen of my year.'²⁰¹ Ironically, however, he also blamed this head start for his neglect of his studies whilst at Cambridge.²⁰²

Despite his 'twelve-month's start', Wordsworth found it difficult to settle into the academic routine at Cambridge, and expressed retrospectively in *The Prelude* (published 1850, but written and revised from 1799) his sense of alienation almost from the outset:

From the first crude days
Of settling time in this my new abode,
Not seldom had I melancholy thoughts
From personal and family regards
Wishing to hope without a hope, some fears
About my future worldly maintenance,
And, more than all, a strangeness in the mind,
A feeling that I was not for that hour,
Nor for that place.²⁰³

Wordsworth's academic career, as recorded in the results of the twice-yearly examinations at St. John's, was undistinguished. In his first year, he was placed in the first class; in the following year in the second class; thereafter he was unplaced.²⁰⁴ As he records in *The Prelude*, Wordsworth was opposed to many aspects of College life, particularly compulsory attendance at College Chapel. He also saw no attraction in

²⁰¹ Schneider, pp. 5-7.

²⁰² Moorman, Vol. 1, pp. 89-90.

²⁰³ Wordsworth, *The Thirteen-Book Prelude*, ed. by J. B. Owen (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), Book Third, lines 74-80.

²⁰⁴ Moorman, Vol I, p. 93.

the lives of the College Fellows, who, during his time at St. John's numbered fifty-five, almost all clergymen. Fellows at that time had no teaching or research responsibilities, and the younger ones were underemployed, essentially biding their time until a Church living became available.²⁰⁵ The main reason Wordsworth took against the idea of a Fellowship, however, seems to have been his intense dislike for the highly competitive atmosphere around examinations, particularly amongst candidates for the Tripos.

Having decided not to read for an honours degree in preparation for a Fellowship, Wordsworth gave up formal studies almost completely. He taught himself to read French, Spanish and Italian, becoming a pupil of Agostino Isola, who had taught Thomas Gray Italian, and whom Gray had appointed to the University when he was Professor of History. Wordsworth also re-read Latin poetry, particularly Virgil's *Georgics*, and English poetry, including Milton, Spenser, Cowper's *The Task* (1785), and Langthorne's *Country Justice* (1774-77), of which Wordsworth later wrote that it was 'the first poem, unless Shenstone's *Schoolmistress* be excepted, that fairly brought the Muse into common life.' *The Country Justice* was an eloquent plea for the more humane treatment of beggars, gypsies and homeless women by magistrates, prefiguring Wordsworth's interest in such characters in his poetry.²⁰⁶ One section of *The Country Justice* deals with the harsh treatment of a female vagrant, a theme close to Wordsworth's heart:

Worn with long toil on many a painful road,
That toil increas'd by Nature's growing load,

²⁰⁵ Moorman, Vol I, p. 95.

²⁰⁶ Moorman, Vol. I, pp. 101-102.

When ev'ning brought the friendly hour of rest,
And all the mother throng'd about her breast,
The ruffian officer oppos'd her stay,
And, cruel, bore her in her pangs away
So far beyond the town's last limits drove
That to return were hopeless, had she strove.²⁰⁷

Langhorne was born in Westmoreland, so his poems were also attractive to Wordsworth for reasons of local patriotism.

Reports of Wordsworth being unplaced in his final half-yearly examinations at St. John's reached his family, and Dorothy Wordsworth expressed her concerns about Wordsworth's future in a letter to her friend Jane Pollard in April 1790:

I am very anxious about him just now, as he will shortly have to provide for himself: next year he takes his degree; when he will go into orders I do not know, nor how he will employ himself, he must, when he is three and twenty either go into orders or take pupils.²⁰⁸

By this time, Wordsworth had firmly decided not to sit for the Tripos, which essentially meant that a Fellowship was no longer a possibility.²⁰⁹ He later indicated that he regretted having neglected his studies at Cambridge, writing in April 1801 to Ann Taylor, who had asked Wordsworth about his early influences, that:

²⁰⁷ John Langhorne, 'The Country Justice, Part the Second' in *The Poetical Works of John Langhorne, D D*, ed. by the Rev. J. T. Langhorne (London: J. Mawman, 1804, republished Farnborough: Gregg International Publishers Ltd, 1971), Vol. II, p. 72.

²⁰⁸ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters: I, The Early Years 1787-1805*, arranged and ed. by Ernest de Selincourt, revised by Chester L. Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 29.

²⁰⁹ Moorman, Vol I, p. 126.

I did not, as in some respects I greatly regret, devote myself to the studies of the University. This neglect of university studies will be easily comprehended by you, when I inform you, that I employed the last of my summer vacations in a pedestrian tour in the Alps.²¹⁰

Wordsworth eventually took his BA degree in January 1791, with his future career undecided.

Wordsworth's early ideas about education

Despite his own undistinguished academic career, Wordsworth was always willing to advise others on their children's education. His first direct experience here was in 1797, when he and Dorothy Wordsworth looked after Basil Montagu's young son (also named Basil), who was failing to thrive at home in London. Wordsworth and Dorothy educated the boy on what would then have been regarded as 'progressive' lines, providing him with plenty of fresh air and exercise and little in the way of book-learning. As Dorothy Wordsworth wrote to Jane Marshall:

[O]ur system regarding Basil [...] is a very simple one, so simple that in this age of systems you will be hardly likely to follow it. We teach him nothing at present but what he learns from the evidence of his senses. He has an insatiable curiosity which we are always careful to satisfy to the best of our ability. [...] He knows his letters, but we have not attempted any further step in the path of *book learning*.²¹¹

It is interesting, and ironic in view of Wordsworth's later advocacy of Bell's Madras system, that at this time Dorothy and Wordsworth himself seem to be rejecting any

²¹⁰ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters I*, 327.

²¹¹ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters I*, 180.

idea of a 'system of education', a position to which Wordsworth would revert in later life. Basil Montagu junior subsequently alleged that he had been mistreated by the Wordsworths when a child. According to an unpublished memoir of Montagu's father, cited by Moorman: 'He stated that when living with [them] they had treated him with such cruelty that he was constantly employed in the most menial occupations and but for the pity of the poor villagers who privately provided him with such pittance as they could ill spare, he would have starved.'²¹² However, he later admitted that the accusations were untrue. Dorothy Wordsworth subsequently nursed him for three months when he fell ill during a visit to a friend of Southey in Keswick.²¹³

Despite the Wordsworths' avowed rejection of 'systems of education', Alan Hill suggests that their approach to Basil's education was in fact based around the theories of John Comenius, a Czech philosopher who had been invited to England by Samuel Hartlib during the Commonwealth, and whose ideas were promoted by Milton amongst others.²¹⁴ In the preface to his book *Orbis Pictus* (1658), a picture book for children, Comenius wrote:

The generality of Schools go on in the same dull road, wherein a great part of Children's time is lost in a tiresome keeping up a pack of dry and unprofitable,

²¹² Moorman, Vol II, pp. 237-8.

²¹³ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters III, The Middle Years Part II 1812-1820*, arranged and ed. by Ernest de Selincourt, revised by Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 130; Moorman, Vol II, p. 238.

²¹⁴ Alan G. Hill, 'Wordsworth, Comenius, and the Meaning of Education', *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 26, No. 103 (Aug. 1975), pp. 301-312. In support of his argument, Hill points out that Wordsworth owned a copy of the 1777 edition of Comenius' *Orbis Pictus*.

or pernicious Notions [...] whilst Things really perfected of the understanding, and useful in every state of life, are left unregarded.

Comenius' basic premise, derived from a theory of Plato, elaborated by Aristotle, is that there is nothing in the understanding that was not before in the senses; so that learning must therefore begin with right perception, before the data of the senses are combined into concepts of increasing abstraction and complexity. To ensure that this happened, Comenius taught in the open air, so that things and the words for those things were naturally associated. In Comenius' words: 'To exercise the senses well about the right perceiving of different things will be to lay the ground for all wisdom, and all wise discourse, and all discreet actions in one's course of life.'²¹⁵

As Hill points out, this approach, which underlies all of Wordsworth's thoughts on education, was in direct contrast to the 'hothouse' method proposed by Thomas Wedgwood, under which gifted children were to be locked up in a controlled indoor environment, so that their senses would be rigorously directed in the interests of speedier intellectual development.²¹⁶ Such 'cramming' methods remained anathema to Wordsworth throughout his life, firstly because, in his view, they missed the whole point of education, and secondly because of their adverse effect on children's character and morals. Duncan Wu, pointing out that the Preface to *The Borderers* (1795-96) contains a reference to Rousseau's *Emile*, tentatively suggests that *Emile* may also have influenced the Wordsworths' approach to educating Montagu.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Alan G. Hill, 'Wordsworth, Comenius, and the Meaning of Education', p. 303.

²¹⁶ Alan G. Hill, 'Wordsworth, Comenius, and the Meaning of Education', pp. 307-308.

²¹⁷ Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading, 1770-1799*, pp. 119-20.

Wordsworth's developing views on education are reflected in an undated letter to 'an unknown correspondent' tentatively dated to either 1804 or 1806.²¹⁸ Whilst declining an invitation to provide his thoughts on 'instructions [...] for parents', because, as he put it, his own thoughts on this were 'unarranged', Wordsworth nevertheless sets out in some detail how best the correspondent should educate his own daughter, a gifted child, apparently in danger of becoming vain and selfish. The unspoken assumption in Wordsworth's advice is that the girl would be educated at home, as was the normal middle-class practice at the time, though not the practice subsequently followed by Wordsworth with his own daughter Dora.

Having cautioned against 'mortifying her', and 'preaching to her about her own defects', Wordsworth also warns against 'overrunning her infancy with books about Good Boys and Girls, and bad Boys and Girls, and all that trumpery', a criticism very much in line with that made of such books by Coleridge in his lectures on education, and in direct contrast to Maria Edgeworth's preference for such books (see Chapters one and three).²¹⁹

Wordsworth then sets out three types of knowledge, in order of merit. The first, and best, he sees as 'such knowledge as will lead her out of herself [...] things known because they are interesting, not interesting because they are known'. Such knowledge will leave the girl 'at liberty to luxuriate in such feelings and images as will feed her mind in silent pleasure.' He gives examples of where this type of knowledge can be found:

²¹⁸ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters II, The Middle Years Part One 1806-11*, arranged and ed. by Ernest de Selincourt, revised by Mary Moorman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 284-88.

²¹⁹ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters II*, 286-87.

[I]n faery tales, romances, the best biographies and histories, and such part of natural history relating to the powers and appearances of the earth and elements, and the habits and structures of animals, as belong to it, not as an art or science, but as a magazine of form and feeling. This kind of knowledge is purely good; a direct antidote to every evil to be apprehended.²²⁰

It is significant that Wordsworth singles out 'faery tales and romances'; as outlined in Chapter one, in the opinion of many educational reformers, romances were unsuitable reading for girls, as they gave a false idea of life, whilst fairy stories might lead to superstition and were, by their nature, untrue. Wordsworth's support for fairy stories, which was shared by Coleridge, Southey and Lamb, is reflected in Book V of *The Prelude*:

Oh, give us once again the Wishing-Cap
Of Fortunatus, and the invisible Coat
Of Jack the Giant-killer, Robin Hood,
And Sabra in the forest with St. George!
The Child whose love is here, at least doth reap
One precious gain, that he forgets himself.²²¹

The final line encapsulates why Wordsworth was in favour of 'imaginative' reading for children – it gave them a means of escape from their own personalities.

The second type of knowledge is what, broadly speaking, might be termed 'accomplishments'; what Wordsworth describes as 'such knowledge as, while it is

²²⁰ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* II, 287.

²²¹ Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book V, lines 364-369.

chiefly interesting for its own sake admits the fellowship of another sort of pleasure, that of complacency from the conscious exertion of the faculties and love of praise.' Wordsworth gives as examples 'The accomplishments of dancing, music and drawing [...] grammar, learning of languages, botany [...] and out of the way knowledge of arts and manufacture, &c'. Whilst in Wordsworth's view such knowledge tends to 'feed vanity and self-conceit', this is offset by their 'furnishing the mind with power and independent gratification', which will cause the vanity to disappear.²²²

The final type of knowledge Wordsworth describes as knowledge of things which are 'interesting almost solely because they are known, and the knowledge may be displayed', and this, laments Wordsworth 'unfortunately comprehends three fourths of what, according to the plan of modern education, children's heads are stuff'd with, that is, minute remote or trifling facts on geography, topography natural history chronology &c'. Such knowledge, or accomplishments which the child makes 'by rote', are in Wordsworth's opinion, 'of no value in themselves, but as they show cleverness; things hurtful to any temper, but to a child like yours absolute poison.'²²³ Both Coleridge and Hazlitt later railed against this type of 'Utilitarian' education, which would eventually be satirised by Dickens in *Hard Times* (1854) (see Chapters three and four).

Wordsworth concludes by recommending that the child should be made to adhere to the truth at all times: 'I mean to the minutest accuracy in every thing which she relates; this will strike at the root of evil by teaching her to form correct

²²² William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* II, 287.

²²³ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* II, 287.

notions of present things, and will steadily strengthen her mind.’²²⁴ This emphasis on truth telling as a priority was in line with Maria Edgeworth’s theories in *Practical Education* and was echoed by Coleridge in his lectures on education. It also contrasted with Rousseau’s advocacy of ‘pious frauds’ to trick children, who were incapable of making moral judgements, into virtue. Where Coleridge differed from Wordsworth was in maintaining that, in order to be ‘accurate’, language had to be policed by the educated classes. Wordsworth ends by emphasising that it is important ‘not to dampen her natural vivacity, for this might have a very bad effect.’²²⁵

Two years later, Wordsworth’s views on education were no longer ‘unarranged’. In June 1808 he wrote to Francis Wrangham on the subject of educational reform in the context of the Industrial Revolution, questioning whether a truly national system of education, as proposed by Wrangham, was either possible or desirable: ‘We are Mariners, Miners, Manufacturers [...]: Tradesmen, Husbandmen, everything. What form of discipline, what Books or doctrines I will not say would equally suit all of these, but which, if happily fit for one, would not perhaps be an absolute nuisance in another?’ He then sets out what he sees as the reasons for the relatively good level of education in his part of England:

We have thank heaven free schools, or schools with some endowment, almost everywhere, and almost every one can read; but not because we have free or endowed schools, but because our land is, far more than elsewhere, tilled by Men who are the Owners of it; and as the population is not over-crowded, and

²²⁴ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* II, 287-88.

²²⁵ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* II, 288.

as the vices which are quickened and cherished in a crowded population do not therefore prevail, Parents have more ability and inclination to send their children to School.²²⁶

Comparing this with the situation in Scotland, at that time almost universally recognised as having a better elementary educational system than England,

Wordsworth continues:

If in Scotland the Children are sent to School, where the Parents have not the advantage I have been speaking of, it is chiefly because their labour can be turned to no account at home. Send among them Manufacturers, or Farmers on a large scale, and, you may indeed substitute Sunday-schools, or other modes of instructing them, but the ordinary parish Schools will be neglected.²²⁷

Wordsworth therefore saw the pattern of land ownership as inseparable from the high value placed on education in his area:

The influence of our schools in this neighbourhood can never be understood if this their connection with the state of landed property be overlooked. [...] [T]his ability [...] of giving their children instruction contributes to spread a respect for Scholarship through the County. [...] [C]onnection of families with

²²⁶ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* II, 250. Francis Wrangham, some ten years older than Wordsworth, was a poet, essayist and translator of Greek and Latin literature. He campaigned for the abolition of slavery and advocated progressive ideas such as the education of women, Catholic emancipation, and a wider provision of charity schools and hospitals and free libraries. See 'Wrangham, Francis (1769–1842)' by David Kaloustian in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/30009>> [Accessed 6 November 2017]. Wordsworth's letter was in response to a sermon by Wrangham entitled 'The Gospel best promulgated by National Schools' (see Moorman, Vol II, p. 177).

²²⁷ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* II, 250.

[the profession of clergyman] assisted not a little to elevate their feelings, and conferred importance on them in their own eyes.²²⁸

Wordsworth's somewhat pessimistic conclusion is that a system of national education is almost certainly doomed to failure because of the corrupt nature of government:

[B]egin your education at the top of society; let the head go in the right course and the tail will follow. But what can you expect of national education conducted by a Government which for twenty years resisted the abolition of the Slave Trade; and annually debauches the morals of the people by every possible device? holding out the temptation with one hand, and scourging with the other. The distilleries and Lotteries are standing records that the Government cares nothing for the morals of the People, and that all they want is their money.²²⁹

At this point, therefore, Wordsworth was still concerned about the dangers of overly regimented education, and his reservations about a national system of education are, perhaps surprisingly, very similar to those voiced by Hazlitt at around the same time (see Chapter four).

In the 'Reply to Mathetes', printed in Coleridge's journal *The Friend* in December 1809 and January 1810, Wordsworth, using the pseudonym 'M.M.', states that: "There is a life and spirit in knowledge, which we extract from truths scattered for the benefit of all [...] which is seldom found in knowledge communicated by

²²⁸ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* II, 250-51.

²²⁹ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* II, 251.

formal and direct precepts.’²³⁰ ‘Mathetes’ was the pseudonym of two young men, since identified as John Wilson (who later wrote under the pseudonym ‘Christopher North’ in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*) and Alexander Blair. They had sought advice from *The Friend* on the proper conduct of life for ‘those [...] bred up under our unfavourable System of Education.’ With a glance back to his own unorthodox education and struggles to resist to family pressures, Wordsworth comments that:

Every Age hath abounded in instances of Parents, Kindred and Friends, who, by indirect influence of example, or by direct injunction and exhortation, have diverted or discouraged the Youth who [...] had determined to follow his intellectual genius through good and through evil. [...] Above all, have not the common duties and cares of common life, at all times exposed Men to injury, from causes whose action is the more fatal from being silent and unremitting [...] which must have pressed upon and consumed the diviner spirit.²³¹

These regrets are expressed in a more personal form in *The Prelude*, where Wordsworth describes how a combination of family pressures and his own cowardice and indolence meant that he failed to make the best use of his time at Cambridge, not only by neglecting the curriculum, but also by failing to pursue ‘a course of independent study’:

[...] And who can tell,
Who knows what thus may have been gain’d, both then

²³⁰ Wordsworth, ‘Reply to Mathetes’, in Coleridge, *Collected Works IV, The Friend*, ed. by Barbara E. Rooke (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1969) II, 229-232 and 260-269 (p. 230).

²³¹ Wordsworth, ‘Reply to Mathetes’, p. 231. These words have a certain irony in the light of Wordsworth’s later attempts to steer his own sons towards acceptable conventional careers.

And at a later season, or preserv'd;
What love of nature, what original strength
Of contemplation, what intuitive truths
The deepest and the best, and what research
Unbiass'd, unbewilder'd, and unaw'd?²³²

Presumably Wordsworth felt in retrospect that his wide reading in English, Classical literature, and studies of foreign languages whilst at Cambridge did not quite merit the description 'a course of independent study'.

Later in the 'Reply to Mathetes', Wordsworth outlined what he saw as the two different aims of education; to attain worldly success, or to gain knowledge purely for intellectual pleasure. He suggested that the 'youthful mind' was particularly capable of distinguishing these two aims by asking itself:

Am I chiefly gratified by the exertion of my power from the pure pleasure of intellectual activity, and from the knowledge thereby acquired? In other words, to what degree do I value my faculties and attainments for their own sakes? or are they chiefly prized by me on account of the distinction which they confer, or the superiority which they give me over others? Am I aware that immediate influence and a general acknowledgement of merit, are no necessary adjuncts of a successful adherence to study and meditation in those departments of knowledge which are of most value to mankind?²³³

Wordsworth warns 'Mathetes' that possession of what he terms 'Intellectual Prowess' will not lead to worldly success; instead she 'lays nakedly before him a

²³² Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book VI, lines 48-54.

²³³ Wordsworth, 'Reply to Mathetes', pp. 261-62.

scheme of solitary and unremitting labour, a life of entire neglect perhaps, or assuredly a life exposed to scorn, insult, persecution, and hatred.' The consolation for these harms will be 'encouragement from a grateful few [...] applauding conscience, and by a prophetic anticipation, perhaps, of fame.'²³⁴ Wordsworth is clearly warning 'Mathetes' about the risk of falling between two stools, as at this point he felt that he himself had done, by gaining neither worldly success nor intellectual prowess.

Wordsworth and Andrew Bell

Despite his reservations about 'direct and formal precepts', Wordsworth continued to search for a national system of education, based on sound Anglican doctrine, and with a moral basis. The search reached its conclusion when, through Coleridge and Southey, he discovered the work of Andrew Bell. Duncan Wu demonstrates that Wordsworth first read Bell's book on the Madras system between June and October 1808.²³⁵ Wordsworth, writing to Francis Wrangham in October 1808, states that 'I have read Dr. Bell's Book upon education [...] it is a most interesting work and entitles him to the fervent gratitude of all good men', but does not mention Bell in 'Reply to Mathetes', written over a year later.²³⁶

Wordsworth came to see Bell's system as the best means of promoting some form of national education, which, in his view, was an essential precursor of any political reform; in particular any extension of the voting population (a view shared by Southey and Coleridge). He had written to Daniel Stuart in 1809:

²³⁴ Ibid, p. 262. As discussed in Chapter five, De Quincey also followed what amounted to an independent course of study whilst at Oxford.

²³⁵ Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading 1800-1815*, pp. 20-1

²³⁶ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters II*, 269.

Two things are absolutely wanted in this Country; a thorough reform in Parliament and a new course of education, which must be preceded by some genuine philosophical writings from some quarter or other, to teach the principles upon which that education should be grounded. We have in our language better books than exist in any other, and in our lands better institutions, but the one nobody reads, and the others are fallen into disorder and decay.²³⁷

Bell's system had, in Wordsworth's opinion, the great advantage of being based around the teachings of the Church of England, unlike the rival system of Lancaster, which was non-denominational, and thus favoured by Dissenters. Apart from suiting Wordsworth's own sectarian preferences, adopting Bell's system would be pragmatic, as most primary and grammar schools were at that time either run by, or under the influence of, the Church of England. Wordsworth, in a letter dated 3 December 1808, sternly rebuked Wrangham, who had suggested that it did not much matter which of the two had invented the system: 'If Dr Bell's plan of education be of that importance which it appears to be of, it cannot be a matter of indifference whether he, or Lancaster, have a rightful claim to the invention. For Heaven's sake, let all benefactors of their species have the honour due to them.'²³⁸

Andrew Bell first visited Grasmere in September 1811. There he met William Johnson, the curate of the parish church and also the schoolmaster, who had introduced Bell's system at Grasmere School. Johnson's successor described

²³⁷ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* II, 296. As discussed below, Wordsworth was sceptical about the value of the reform of Parliament resulting from the Reform Act of 1832.

²³⁸ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* II, 278.

Grasmere School at this time as ‘a very low, dark and poor building’ with ‘a long flat table, a few forms, and a chair at one end for the master. [...] The children came up individually four times a day and managed, somehow or other, to get through as many lessons.’²³⁹ The building was too small for a full experiment on the Madras system, but Bell taught a few lessons there with Wordsworth’s assistance, ‘he kindly taking it upon him to teach the Boys, and also the Master and myself.’²⁴⁰

On his second visit to Grasmere, in September 1812, Bell stayed with the Wordsworths for a fortnight, calling their house ‘my headquarters of repose and study’, and proceeded to prepare a new edition of his book on the Madras System, with the assistance of Dorothy Wordsworth, who, according to Cuthbert Southey, ‘spent much time and labour remodelling his work for him and indeed re-wrote it entirely, much to his satisfaction at the time; subsequently, however, he threw this ms. aside and published it nearly as he had originally composed it.’²⁴¹

Wordsworth publicly advocated a system of universal national education in Book IX of *The Excursion* (1814), looking forward to the coming of the time:

When, prizing knowledge as her noblest wealth
And best protection, this Imperial Realm,
While she exacts allegiance, shall admit
An obligation, on her part, to *teach*
Them who are born to serve her and obey;
Binding herself by Statute to secure

²³⁹ Cuthbert Southey, *Life of Bell*, Vol II, pp. 424-25.

²⁴⁰ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* II, 515, cited in Richardson, p. 98.

²⁴¹ Cuthbert Southey, *Life of Bell*, Vol. II, p. 420.

For all the Children whom her soil maintains

The rudiments of Letters, and to inform

The mind with moral and religious truth²⁴²

Such education would secure the nation against raising 'A savage Horde among the civilized/A servile Band among the lordly free!²⁴³ In a footnote to these lines,

Wordsworth wrote that:

The discovery of Dr Bell affords marvellous facilities for carrying this [general basic education] into effect, and it is impossible to overrate the benefit which might accrue to humanity from the universal application of this simple engine under an enlightened and conscientious government.²⁴⁴

In further lines, Wordsworth suggests that what is needed are 'unambitious Schools/Instructing simple Childhood's ready ear.'²⁴⁵ This emphasis on 'unambitious Schools' prefigures his later concerns about over-educating the lower classes.²⁴⁶

Richardson contrasts Wordsworth's 'libertarian critique' of 'rationalist upbringing' in *The Prelude* with the 'disciplinary, nationalist approach to those born

²⁴² Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, Book IX, lines 293-301.

²⁴³ Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, Book IX, lines 308-9. There is some perhaps some contradiction here in Wordsworth's hope that education would prevent 'servility' amongst those 'born to serve and obey'.

²⁴⁴ Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, p. 314.

²⁴⁵ Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, Book IX, lines 398-99.

²⁴⁶ While remaining convinced of the value of the Madras system for several years, Wordsworth later modified his opinion of Bell, mainly because of Bell's treatment of William Johnson, appointed by Bell in 1812 as Headmaster of the Central School in London. He wrote to his brother Christopher in 1816 that Bell had, from being Johnson's 'best Friend and firmest Supporter' changed into 'a jealous opponent' (William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* III, 271). Before becoming Headmaster of the Central School, Johnson had been a curate at Wordsworth's parish church, and was a friend of the family.

to serve and obey in *The Excursion*, suggesting a class basis for this distinction, and implying that Wordsworth, along with Coleridge and Southey, saw Bell's system as suitable for the children of the poor, but not for middle-class children.²⁴⁷ This suggestion, however, ignores the fact that many middle-class schools, and several major public schools, adopted Bell's system. Indeed, as explained in Chapter three, Coleridge, in his 1808 lecture on education, stressed the importance of Bell's system beyond the mass education of the poor.

The education of Wordsworth's children

Bell's Madras system had more than a theoretical appeal for Wordsworth. Despite his own, very positive, educational experience at Hawkshead Grammar School, Wordsworth envisaged a different form of education for his two surviving sons, John and Willy. One possible reason for this was that Hawkshead was already in decline by the time Wordsworth's sons were old enough to attend the school. More importantly, perhaps, because of his interest, which amounted to an obsession, in Bell's system, Wordsworth went to great pains to send his sons to schools that used the Madras system, though with what turned out to be unsatisfactory results for both boys. He firstly tried unsuccessfully to enter his elder son John into Charterhouse School, at that time in the City of London, because it had adopted Bell's system. The reason the school gave for refusing to admit John was his age (he was fifteen at the time) but Wordsworth clearly suspected other factors. John was a willing but slow learner, and Wordsworth's letter to his brother Christopher when John was refused a place at Charterhouse shows how much reliance he had placed on the Madras system to help him:

²⁴⁷ Richardson, p. 101.

If I understand the Madras system, one of its fundamental principles is; that so far from want of quickness being an objection, the efficiency of the new system is chiefly shewn in the treatment of slow Boys. - One Boy advances *more rapidly* than another, but *all* are made to advance according to their talents. [...] [The Headmaster] must submit to the charge brought against most Masters of Public Schools, viz., that of indifference concerning the mass and the slower Boys, provided a few at the top can make a brilliant figure.²⁴⁸

Despite these misgivings, Wordsworth, in the same letter, says that he would like to send his younger son Willy, then at the Central School, also run on Bell's system, to Charterhouse as a foundation scholar. Willy indeed went on from the Central School to Charterhouse but was unhappy and idle there. He left after a year, ostensibly for health reasons, and completed his studies at Ambleside. There he was taught for a time by Coleridge's son Hartley.

John was eventually found a place at Sedbergh Grammar School. From there, he was secured a place as a gentleman commoner at New College Oxford through the influence of Augustus Hare, a tutor at the College and an admirer of Wordsworth.²⁴⁹ Dorothy Wordsworth wrote of John at this time: 'Indeed he is a thoroughly excellent

²⁴⁸ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* III, 513. In the same letter, Wordsworth's description of John's difficulties with reading and spelling suggests that John might have suffered from dyslexia.

²⁴⁹ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* IV, *The Later Years Part I, 1821-1828*, revised, ed. and arranged by Alan G. Hill from the first edition by Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 190-92. In university jargon, a 'commoner' is a student who is not on a scholarship; as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*: 'One who pays for his commons, i.e. a student or undergraduate not on the foundation'.
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/37224?rskey=NIKmej&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid> [Accessed 2 April 2017].

Youth. And will, I am confident, in time, be more than a respectable scholar.'²⁵⁰ John, like Wordsworth himself, would have liked to join the Army, but, as in Wordsworth's case, the cost of a commission made this impossible. He did not take an honours degree because, according to Wordsworth, he had suffered ill health in his final year.²⁵¹ He was eventually found a living as a vicar in the Church of England through family connections.

Willy, like his brother and father, sought a career in the Army and in 1827 tried unsuccessfully to obtain a commission. Wordsworth was concerned about Willy's health, but did not actively oppose his efforts to join the Army. He wrote to Samuel Rogers in November 1827, almost despairingly, that Willy was 'bent upon being a beggar in the honourable character and profession of a Soldier or of a Farmer.' He asked whether Rogers could 'suggest to me anything better for this infatuated youth – any situation in a Counting-House or a public office?'²⁵² Possibly on Rogers' advice, Willy was sent to Bremen in 1829 to learn German, with a view to a business career in 'a Counting House, or a manufacturing concern.'²⁵³ This plan came to nothing, and Wordsworth eventually secured Willy a minor post as sub-distributor of stamps for Carlisle when he himself was awarded a Civil List pension.

In contrast to the usual middle-class practice of educating girls at home, Dora Wordsworth was sent to a number of small boarding schools from the age of five, with a break in her education caused by the death of her sister Catherine in 1812.

²⁵⁰ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* IV, 105.

²⁵¹ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* IV, 499.

²⁵² William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* IV, 556.

²⁵³ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* IV, 651.

After a disastrous attempt at teaching her at home, when, in Dorothy Wordsworth's words, 'sometimes we have terrible Battles – and long confinements', Dora was sent in 1818 as a boarder to Miss Dowling's school in Ambleside, and remained there until 1821.²⁵⁴ Dorothy Wordsworth wrote to a friend when Dora was thirteen that: 'It is very mortifying that hitherto she should have had so little steadiness in learning; and my belief is that if we had been less anxious about her and had taken less pains she would have done much more for herself', adding that Dora was 'often wayward and has fits of obstinacy with pride.'²⁵⁵

In an attempt to make her 'apply more attention' to her studies, Dora was, unusually for a girl at the time, taught Latin. Dorothy Wordsworth wrote to a friend: 'As to her Latin she makes a poor progress, for she has no pride in it; but she will, I hope, make a tolerable Latin scholar.'²⁵⁶ By the time Dora was fifteen, Dorothy wrote that she was 'well placed for general improvement, and for the correction of her peculiar faults as it is possible for a girl to be. She is [...] not yet quite steady, but in due time I think she will be so.'²⁵⁷ After a brief period of teaching at Miss Dowling's school, Dora stayed at home and acted as Wordsworth's amanuensis until her marriage to Edward Quillinan in 1841.²⁵⁸

In view both of Wordsworth's own unorthodox educational career, and his strongly unfavourable view of both 'useful knowledge' and competitive

²⁵⁴ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* III, 40, 484.

²⁵⁵ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* III, 294.

²⁵⁶ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* III, 371.

²⁵⁷ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* III, 551-52.

²⁵⁸ Moorman, Vol II, pp. 414-15.

examinations, it is interesting to read the advice he gave to Daniel Stuart in 1817 about an unnamed protégé whom Stuart intended to become a lawyer. Having recommended sending the youth to ‘Winchester, Harrow, Rugby, or any other Public School of celebrity’, essentially to polish his manners and eliminate his ‘awkwardness, want of self-possession [...] etc., etc.’, Wordsworth recommends that he be ‘immediately examined, in Latin and Greek, by some competent Person’. If judged by that person to be suitably qualified, he should be sent to public school for a year, and then Stuart should seek to have him admitted to Trinity College Cambridge, where, in contrast to Oxford:

[H]e will have stronger incitements and inducements to apply to Mathematics; and, if he is able to fix his attention so far as to make a progress in those sciences, the assiduity and steady application of the thoughts requisite for success in Law will not be more than he will find himself already prepared for.²⁵⁹

This advice, whilst eminently sensible, is of course precisely the opposite of the course pursued by Wordsworth himself at Cambridge, where he determinedly studied whatever he wanted, almost entirely neglecting mathematics. He later gave similarly pragmatic advice to Stuart when Stuart’s son was intent on becoming a clergyman, suggesting he aim for a Fellowship, again recommending Trinity College because of its ‘liberal endowments’.

Wordsworth’s change of mind

²⁵⁹ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* III, 397-8. As discussed in Chapter one, the idea of sending a boy to a public school in order to polish his manners and remove any ‘rustic accent’ was put forward by Maria Edgeworth in *Practical Education*.

By 1828, with his own children grown, Wordsworth had become sceptical of the value of Bell's system, particularly in the education of girls. He wrote in December of that year to the Reverend Hugh James Rose, in the context of a letter about the effects of industrialisation on the nation's morals:

[I]n the little town of Ambleside [...] a party, the leaders of which are young ladies, are determined to set up a school for girls on the Madras system, confidently expecting that these girls will in consequence be less likely to go astray when they grow up to be women. Alas, alas! they may be taught, I own, more quickly to read and write under the Madras system, and to answer more readily, and perhaps with more intelligence, questions put to them, than they could have done under dame-teaching. But [...] I will back Shenstone's school-mistress [...] against all Dr Bell's sour-looking teachers in petticoats that I have ever seen.²⁶⁰

Possibly because of his son Willy's unsatisfactory experiences at the Central School and Charterhouse, Wordsworth had by this time identified the chief drawback of Bell's system; its neglect of the role played by imagination in learning:

The Bellites [...] talk about moral discipline; but wherein does it encourage the imaginative feelings, without which the practical understanding is of little avail, and too apt to become the cunning slave of the bad passions? I dislike *display* in everything; above all in education ...²⁶¹

In a sense, then, Wordsworth had reverted to the sceptical view of 'book-learning' he had expressed in 'The Tables Turned':

²⁶⁰ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* IV, 685.

²⁶¹ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* IV, 686.

Enough of science and of art;
Close up these barren leaves;
Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives.²⁶²

Wordsworth also took the opportunity in this letter to take a swipe at the Utilitarian educators, such as Lord Brougham: '[W]ho think that sharpening of intellect and attainment of knowledge are things good in themselves, without reference to the circumstances under which the intellect *is* sharpened, or to the quality of the knowledge acquired.'²⁶³

In a letter to his brother Christopher, Wordsworth explained why he had expressed his concerns to Rose in such strong terms: 'My Notes upon education are not to be understood as if I were averse to the people being educated, quite the contrary. My wish was to guard against too high expectations [...] and to glance upon some grievous errors.'²⁶⁴ The phrase 'too high expectations' could of course refer to two different things; too high an expectation amongst the ruling classes of the results of such education, or too high an expectation amongst the lower classes of their future prospects once educated.

Later that year Wordsworth expanded on his misgivings about both Bell's system and Utilitarian education in a further, longer letter to Rose. In his view, the main problem with both systems was that they concentrated too much on

²⁶² Wordsworth, 'The Tables Turned', lines 29-32, in *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by Michael Mason, p. 100.

²⁶³ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* IV, 685.

²⁶⁴ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* V, *The Later Years Part II 1829-1834*, revised, arranged and ed. by Alan G. Hill from the first edition ed. by Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 55.

developing the intellect, in the process under-valuing or neglecting the moral and imaginative dimensions of education:

But even as a course of tuition I have strong objections to infant schools and in no small degree to the Madras system also. We must not be deceived by premature adroitness. The *intellect* must not be trained with a view to what the infant or child may perform, without constant reference to what that performance promises for the man. [...] The diet they offer is not the natural diet for infant and juvenile minds. [...] Natural history is taught in infant schools by pictures stuck up against walls, and such mummery. A moment's notice of a red-breast pecking by a winter's hearth is worth it all.²⁶⁵

Such educational systems, in Wordsworth's view, also widened the gap between the generations, and risked alienating children from parents because of the differences between home and school environments:

In the present generation I cannot see anything of an harmonious co-operation between these schools and home influences. If the family be thoroughly bad, and the child cannot be removed altogether, how feeble the barrier, how futile the expedient! If the family be of middle character, the children will lose more by separation from domestic cares and reciprocal duties than they can possibly gain from captivity, with such formal instruction as may be administered.²⁶⁶

There is of course some irony here; after his mother's death Wordsworth himself had been rescued from an unhappy home life with his grandparents and transported

²⁶⁵ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters V*, 20.

²⁶⁶ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters V*, 22.

to what he regarded as an idyllic life at Hawkshead, lodging with Ann Tyson, where he was entirely separated from 'domestic cares and reciprocal duties'. He had, albeit reluctantly, sent his younger son away to school in London at the age of nine and, perhaps more surprisingly, sent his daughter to a boarding school at the age of five.

In this letter to Rose, Wordsworth reverted to the distinction between types of knowledge, which he had first raised in his 'letter to an unknown correspondent' over twenty years previously:

The link of eleemosynary [free] tuition connects the infant school with the national schools upon the Madras system. Now I cannot but think that there is too much indiscriminate gratuitous instruction in this country; arising out of the misconception above adverted to, of the real power of school teaching, relative to the discipline of life; and out of an over-value of talent, however exerted, and of knowledge, prized for its own sake, and acquired in the shape of knowledge. The latter clauses of the last sentence glance rather at the London University and the Mechanics' Institutes than at the Madras schools, yet they have some bearing upon these also.²⁶⁷

Wordsworth had by this time come to believe that *any* form of free education was in itself an evil, even if a necessary one, because parents and children would place no value on something provided gratuitously by an anonymous State. The sacrifices previously made by parents to educate their children had, by contrast, provided children with a reason for gratitude and loyalty:

It is undoubtedly to be desired that every one should be able to read, and perhaps (for that is far from being equally apparent) to write. But you will

²⁶⁷ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* V, 22.

agree with me, I think, that these attainments are likely to turn to better account where they are not gratuitously lavished, and where either the parents and connections are possessed of certain property which enables them to procure the instruction for their children, or where, by their frugality and other serious and self-denying habits, they contribute, as far as they can, to benefit their offspring in this way.²⁶⁸

Wordsworth concluded that far from being a benefit, the Utilitarian, non-religious education provided by such bodies as the London University and the Mechanics' Institutes would have a demoralising and ultimately a destabilising effect on the nation:

We have no guarantee in the social condition of these *well* informed pupils for the use they may make of their power and their knowledge; the scheme points not to man as a religious being; its end is an unworthy one; and its means do not pay respect to the order of things. Try the Mechanics' Institutes and the London University, etc. etc. by this test. [...] Mechanics' Institutes make discontented spirits and insubordinate and presumptuous workmen.²⁶⁹

This view of the dangers of an educated working class echoed concerns expressed some thirty years previously by Sarah Trimmer amongst others in the years immediately following the French Revolution. Trimmer had warned that '*Poor* boys, sent out into the world without fixed principles, may in consequence of having been taught to write and read become very dangerous members of society.'²⁷⁰ As

²⁶⁸ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* V, 23.

²⁶⁹ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* V, 23-24.

²⁷⁰ Quoted in Duggett, p. 157.

discussed in Chapter five, De Quincey used similar arguments against mass education later in the nineteenth century.

As in his earlier letter to Rose, Wordsworth provided his brother with some further context to his views on national education, and in this letter, written in April 1830, he is more explicit about the issue of 'class' in education: 'The education of Man [...] is the education of duty, which is most forcible [sic] taught by the business and concerns of life; of which, even for children, especially the children of the poor, book-learning is but a small part.' Wordsworth saw the extension of this type of book learning to be potentially damaging to the stability of society:

There is an officious disposition on the part of the upper and middle classes to precipitate the tendency of people towards intellectual culture in a manner subversive of their own happiness, and dangerous to the peace of Society. It is mournful to observe of how little avail are lessons of Piety taught at school, if household attentions and obligations be neglected in consequence of the time taken up in School tuition; and the head be stuffed with vanity, from the gentlemanliness of the employment of reading.²⁷¹

It is interesting that, in contrast to his early, radical distrust of 'book-learning', Wordsworth, from a conservative perspective, now sees reading as a 'gentlemanly occupation' inappropriate to the lower classes. In a letter to Basil Montagu dated July 1829, Wordsworth looks at the same problem from a slightly different angle: 'We are on fire with zeal to educate the poor, which would be all very well if that zeal did not blind us to what we stand in still more need of, an improved education of the middle

²⁷¹ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* V, 254.

and upper classes.²⁷² Wordsworth does not specify what improvements he has in mind, but they would appear to relate to the lack of a moral dimension to upper- and middle-class education, a challenge taken up by Coleridge and reforming headmasters such as Thomas Arnold at Rugby.

Wordsworth had thus, over a period of around fifteen years, moved from an unreserved advocacy of Bell's system as a 'simple engine' to deliver national education, to a critical view of it as a simplistic, de-humanising system, with considerable dangers for the moral well-being of the nation. In the chapter of *Gothic Romanticism: Architecture, Politics, and Literary Form*, entitled 'Wordsworth's Gothic Education' Tom Duggett explores Wordsworth's changing attitude towards Bell's system, but, I believe he, like Richardson, focuses excessively on the political rather than personal motives behind Wordsworth's change of mind, for example minimizing the extent of Wordsworth's disillusion with Andrew Bell, and ignoring completely Willie Wordsworth's unsatisfactory education at Charterhouse.

Coleridge underwent a similar change of mind on the subject over the same period; having also been a vocal advocate of Bell, and an equally vocal opponent of Joseph Lancaster's rival system, Coleridge ended by concluding, in words which could be Wordsworth's own:

Hence these infant schools so patronized by the bishops and others, who think them a grand invention. Is it found that an infant-school child, who has been bawling all day a column of the multiplication-table, or a verse from the Bible, grows up a more dutiful son or daughter to its parents?²⁷³

²⁷² William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* V, 99.

²⁷³ Coleridge, *Collected Works* XIV, *Table Talk*, ed. by Carl Woodring (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1990), II, 179.

Both writers, who had begun their literary careers as radicals, but who were by now of a conservative, even reactionary, viewpoint, had in effect come around to Hazlitt's consistently hostile opinion of 'new-fangled', state-funded methods of education. As Duggett points out, William Godwin had, in *Political Justice* (1793), put forward a 'radical' case against state education (essentially that it would turn out to be a tool for indoctrinating children into Tory politics), but Hazlitt's objections were actually more akin to Wordsworth's; that such education was 'de-humanising', and that a Classical, humanistic education was intrinsically more worthwhile than a vocational or scientific education.²⁷⁴

Wordsworth reinforced these criticisms in what is believed to have been his only public speech, at the laying of the foundation stone of the new village school at Bowness in April 1836. He focused his attack on the 'cramming' of children's minds, which he described as:

[A]n overstained application to mental processes of arithmetic and mathematics; and a too minute attention to departments of natural and civil history. [...] [T]he display of precocious intellectual power in these branches, is often astonishing; and, in proportion to as it is so, may, for the most part, be pronounced not only useless, but injurious.

Even religious instruction was affected; being, in Wordsworth's words, 'too often given with reference, less to the affections, to the imagination, and to the practical

²⁷⁴ Duggett, p. 152. In Godwin's words: '[E]ven in the petty institution of Sunday schools, the chief lessons that are taught, are a superstitious veneration of the Church of England, and to bow to every handsome man in a coat' (*Political Justice*, Book II, p. 668).

duties, than to subtile [sic] distinction in points of doctrine and to facts of scriptural history, of which a knowledge may be brought out by a catechical process.²⁷⁵

The mischief mainly lay in what Wordsworth saw as the habitual confusion between 'education' and 'tuition':

Education, according to the derivation of the word, and in the only use of which it is strictly justifiable, comprehends all those processes and influences, come from whence they may, that conduce to the best developement [sic] of the bodily powers, and of the moral, intellectual, and spiritual faculties which the position of the individual admits of.²⁷⁶

He trusted the Bowness parents to keep the education of their children at a severely practical level: 'Their shrewd sense perceives that hands full of employment, and a head not above it, afford the best protection against restlessness and discontent'. They would, Wordsworth suggested, wish their daughters' education to be confined to 'reading, writing, arithmetic, and plain needlework, or any other art favourable to economy and home-comforts.' His speech ended with a nostalgic look back to the contented and godly peasantry depicted by Burns in 'The Cottar's Saturday Night' (1786):

How were those *happy* and *worthy* people educated? By the influence of hereditary good example at home, and by their parochial schoolmasters opening the way for the admonitions and exhortations of their clergy; that was at a time when knowledge was perhaps better than now distinguished

²⁷⁵ Wordsworth, *Prose Works* III, 294.

²⁷⁶ Wordsworth, *Prose Works* III, 295.

from smatterings of information, and [...] was more thought of in due subordination to wisdom.²⁷⁷

Wordsworth continued to rail against London University, as he had done consistently since it had first been proposed. He not only feared its political influence, but also regarded its lectures in 'such subjects as Belles Lettres, Law, Political Economy and Morals' to be 'worse than superfluous'. He summed up his contempt for the University in a letter to Crabb Robinson in February 1838. How, Wordsworth asked, could the University provide a regular and liberal course of Education if:

Christianity as promulgated in the Greek Testament, is as a matter of fact, to be excluded? Plague upon such liberality, and shame upon a Ministry who could consent that [...] such a system should be smuggled into a Country, with whose laws and institutions Christianity is so intimately blended, as with ours.²⁷⁸

He reiterated his views on London University in a later letter to Crabb Robinson dated 26 March 1838: 'Your University and College are humbugs. All these attempts to make men cooperate whose opinions are, or, were they conscientious men, ought to be, so widely different, are founded on false views of human Nature.'²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ Wordsworth, *Prose Works* III, 296. It is interesting to contrast what Wordsworth saw as the appropriate education for the girls at Bowness with the education he provided for his own daughter Dora, as discussed above.

²⁷⁸ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* VI, *The Later Years Part III 1835-1839*, revised, arranged and ed. by Alan G. Hill from the first edition ed. by Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 523.

²⁷⁹ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* VI, 542.

As he grew older, Wordsworth became even more convinced that the current and proposed schemes for national education were fundamentally lacking, in that they separated 'book-learning' from the home lives of children. In 1845, he wrote to Seymour Tremenheere, a Fellow of New College and formerly an Inspector of Schools, who had sent him various reports and Minutes from the Committee of the Council on Education:

[L]et me ask you, dear Sir, whether throughout the Minutes too little value is not set upon the occupations of Children out of doors [...] comparatively with what they do or acquire in school? Is not the Knowledge inculcated by the Teacher, or derived under his managem't, from books, too exclusively dwelt upon, so as almost to put out of sight that which comes [...] from intercourse with nature and from experience in the actual employments and duties which a child's situation in the Country [...] will lead him to or impose upon him? [...] Excuse this disagreement in opinion, as coming from one who spent half his boyhood in running wild among the Mountains.²⁸⁰

Another concern that Wordsworth expressed around this time about current educational practice was the emphasis on 'emulation', which Wordsworth himself claimed to have avoided throughout his own education. He wrote to Charles

Wordsworth in 1846:

²⁸⁰ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters VII, The Later Years Part IV 1840-1853*, revised, arranged and ed. by Alan G. Hill from the first edition ed. by Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 733. Tremenheere, whom Wordsworth had met via Harriet Martineau, was appointed an Inspector of Schools in January 1840. He produced nine reports to the Committee of the Council on Education on the state of schools in England and Wales, but resigned in 1842 when he found that his right to free comment in the reports was curtailed. One of his successors as Inspector of Schools was Matthew Arnold. See *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 'Tremenheere, Hugh Seymour (1804–1893)' by D. G. Paz. <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref.odnb/27695>> [Accessed 5 November 2017].

I cannot help being afraid of encouraging emulation – it proves too often closely akin to envy. [...] My own case is, I am aware, a peculiar one in many respects, but I can sincerely affirm, that I am not indebted to emulation for my attainments whatever they may be. I have from my Youth down to this late day cultivated the habit of valuing knowledge for its own sake and for the good that may and ought to come out of it, the unmixed pure good. I used often to press this view of the subject upon the late Dr Bell.²⁸¹

These two late letters encapsulate the basis of Wordsworth's opposition to what were, by then, becoming established 'systems of education'; they separated education from the real world, and they encouraged competition, and hence envy, between children. In these ways they missed the whole point of education, which should ideally, in Wordsworth's view, promote a love of knowledge for its own sake rather than as a means to a career.

Conclusion

In bringing up his own children, Wordsworth's educational theories were sometimes at odds with his practice, although he did try to ensure that his two sons were educated under Bell's Madras system. As noted above, although he bemoaned the premature separation of children from parents caused by the new infant schools, Wordsworth sent his own daughter away to boarding school at the age of five. What is most baffling however is that, having previously denounced rote learning of facts for their own sake as 'hurtful to any temper' and in some cases 'absolute poison', Wordsworth for a number of years uncritically advocated Bell's system of education which, by its nature, relied mostly on rote learning to educate large numbers of children at a relatively low cost.

²⁸¹ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* VII, 765.

Wordsworth, like Coleridge, did eventually come to see the weaknesses of Bell's system. Despite its basis in the doctrines of the Church of England, Bell's system, like secular Utilitarian education, essentially relied upon cramming children's heads with knowledge, ignoring their individual needs and temperaments and providing no scope for their imaginations. Wordsworth also realised belatedly that Bell's system fostered 'emulation', something to which Wordsworth had been opposed ever since his experience of the demoralising effects of academic rivalry at Cambridge. The trend in education seemed to Wordsworth to be increasingly aimed at enabling pupils to pass as many examinations as possible, regardless of the effect on their morals or well-being. Although in some ways a reflection of his move to the political right, with an underlying fear of an educated 'mob', Wordsworth's disillusion with all types of state-provided education could also be seen as a form of moral panic about the de-humanising effect of industrialisation and mechanisation, prefiguring the views of such writers as Charles Dickens, John Stuart Mill and William Morris.

There does, however, remain a contradiction at the heart of Wordsworth's ideas on education, particularly relating to the education of the working class. He deprecated the idea of education as a means to an end rather than as something to be valued intrinsically, yet he also feared that any sort of education beyond the bare minimum (as indicated above, he was unsure that the working class should even be taught how to write) risked giving poorer people ideas above their station and thus making them discontented with their lot. Working-class children, such as those at Bowness, should, in his opinion, have only enough education to provide them with 'hands full of employment and a head not above it'. The net effect was that Wordsworth effectively rejected any idea of social mobility through education; as

Duggett concludes, Wordsworth's final position on education is 'as theoretically liberating in direct proportion as it is practically exclusionary and elitist'.²⁸²

In some ways, Wordsworth's view of educational and electoral reform was the mirror-image of Hazlitt's. As explained in Chapter four, Hazlitt held that extension of the franchise must come first, and saw educational reform as a distraction from this priority. Wordsworth, by contrast, held that electoral reform was itself a chimera, as he explained to Henry Crabb Robinson in 1839: 'I cannot see how any good purpose can be answered by such writing which *indirectly* holds out Universal Suffrage, for the redress of grievances most of which from the nature of things can never be eradicated.'²⁸³ Wordsworth had had strong reservations about even the relatively modest extension of the franchise contained in Lord John Russell's Reform Bill of 1831, which he thought: 'an unwise measure, which could not be carried out but by unworthy means. We are now about to gather the fruits of it in sorrow and repentance.'²⁸⁴

As a further illustration of Wordsworth's 'elitism', whilst bemoaning the unsatisfactory nature of the education provided by public schools and universities, he gave detailed and precise pragmatic advice to individual middle-class parents and guardians on how best to 'play' these systems for their children's benefit, and did not put forward any particular ideas on how public schools and universities could be improved. In fact, Wordsworth seems to envisage three distinct types of education: the most basic literacy and numeracy, suited for the working classes; vocational

²⁸² Duggett, p. 168. It is perhaps significant that Wordsworth's two sons could only find occupations through family connections.

²⁸³ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* VI, 679.

²⁸⁴ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* VI, 3.

education for those destined for a trade or profession, and the 'ideal' education, outlined in 'Reply to Mathetes', where no fixed syllabus is followed and intellectual prowess is its own reward. In Wordsworth's advice to friends, and in the choice of education for his own children, however, pragmatism tended to prevail over idealism.

Chapter Three: Coleridge

This chapter examines Coleridge's education, particularly at Christ's Hospital School, (hereafter CH), and considers how his ideas about education, as revealed in his letters, Notebooks, journal articles and public lectures, were shaped by his experiences at CH. To provide some perspective on Coleridge's experiences, I look at the reminiscences of some contemporary students. The chapter also reflects on the fundamentally ambiguous view of CH in Charles Lamb's two essays on the school, both clearly influenced by Coleridge. It looks at Coleridge's advocacy of the monitorial system of Andrew Bell and his opposition to the rival system of Joseph Lancaster, the education of Coleridge's three children, and Coleridge's eventual disillusion with all 'systems of education'.

In contrast to Wordsworth, whose ideas on education were mainly confined to letters to friends, Coleridge wrote and lectured extensively on the subject. His ideas, which evolved over time, were to a great extent based on his own experiences at school, in particular the ten years he spent at CH. The lessons he drew from his experiences there were mainly negative. There were, in Coleridge's view, three particular weaknesses in the CH system of education. Firstly, the method of teaching was unimaginative and the curriculum narrow. Secondly, pupils were often left with nothing to do for long stretches of time, resulting in procrastination, boredom and misbehaviour. Thirdly, punishments were overly harsh and often arbitrary, based on the favouritism of individual masters. All three weaknesses, and possible solutions to them, were explored in Coleridge's lectures and writings on education, as I discuss below.

Although Coleridge projected several books on education, none was actually published. He did, however, set out his ideas on an 'ideal' curriculum several times,

firstly in his letters written at a time when he thought of becoming a teacher, and in his *Marginalia*. Writing to Charles Lloyd Senior about his scheme for educating Lloyd's son, he explained that: '*Languages* will engross one or two hours in every day: the *elements* of Chemistry, Geography, Mechanics, and Optics the remaining hours of study. After [...] we shall proceed to the study of *Man* and of *Men* - I mean Metaphysics and History - and finally, to a thorough examination of the Jewish and Christian Dispensations.'²⁸⁵ In his marginal comments on Heinrich Steffens' *Die gegenwartige Zeit*, Coleridge suggests: 'From one year to 7, Language with writing. From 7 to 12 – Language with Cyphering – 12 to 15 – Language, Composition. Oratory, Mathematics. – 15 to 18 – These, adding History and Logic.'²⁸⁶ Commenting on Charles Fleury's *Ecclesiastical History* (1727-28), in which Fleury describes Origen's method of instructing his disciples, Coleridge describes this method as a 'noble scheme of Education. 1. Belles Lettres. 2. Logic & Mathematics. 3. Natural History and Astronomy. 4. Ethics & Psychology. 5. Theology. 6. The whole exemplified, applied & turned to their true ends & profit in the study and interpretation of the Scriptures.'²⁸⁷ What Coleridge proposed in such 'ideal curriculums' went well beyond the curriculum offered by CH and other public and grammar schools, and was in fact not dissimilar to the type of education provided by the Dissenting Academies (see Chapter one).

²⁸⁵ Coleridge, *Letters* I, 256. The scheme was abandoned in the light of Charles Lloyd Junior's increasing mental instability.

²⁸⁶ Coleridge, *Collected Works* XII, *Marginalia V, Sherlock to Unidentified*, ed. by H. J. Jackson and George Whalley (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 324.

²⁸⁷ Coleridge, *Collected Works* XII, *Marginalia II, Camden to Hutton*, ed. by George Whalley (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 722.

Coleridge's early education

Coleridge described his early education in a series of autobiographical letters to Thomas Poole in 1797-98, written when Coleridge was twenty-five. His education began at the age of three at the reading-school in Ottery St. Mary, until, at the age of six he was 'admitted into the grammer [*sic*] school, and soon outstripped all of my age.'²⁸⁸ His voluminous reading was encouraged by his father, who 'had resolved, that I should become a Parson [...] he told me the names of the stars - and how Jupiter was a thousand times larger than our world - and that the other twinkling stars were Suns that had other worlds rolling round them.'²⁸⁹ Coleridge maintained that he was able to conceive of such concepts without 'wonder or incredulity' because '[F]rom my early reading of Faery Tales & Genii &c &c - my mind had been habituated *to the Vast*.'²⁹⁰ Coleridge's belief that imaginative tales for children were of more value than explicitly 'moral' stories because they helped to develop children's powers of imagination became a consistent theme in his articles and lectures. Writing in his *Notebooks* in 1811 about his reasons for 'making books', Coleridge states: 'O but think only of all the thoughts, feelings, radical Impulses that have been implanted in how many thousands of thousands by the little Ballad of the Children in the Wood! The Sphere of Alexander the great's Agency is trifling compared with it.'²⁹¹

²⁸⁸ Coleridge, *Letters* I, 348.

²⁸⁹ Coleridge, *Letters* I, 354.

²⁹⁰ Coleridge, *Letters* I, p. 354.

²⁹¹ Coleridge, *Notebooks* III, 1808-1819, ed. by Kathleen Coburn, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973) note 4082. The reference is to the ballad 'The Children in the Wood' printed in Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* (1765). The ballad was

Coleridge's precocity in reading is highlighted in a letter to Poole, where he writes: 'At six years old I remember to have read Belisarius, Robinson Crusoe & Philip Quarle.'²⁹² These claims have been questioned by some critics and have been seen by others as an example of Coleridge's boastfulness, but they need to be taken in context. Coleridge makes it clear that he took to reading so much only because others were unwilling to play with him: 'So I became fretful, & timorous & a tell-tale - & the School-boys drove me from play, & were always tormenting me - & hence I took no pleasure in boyish sports - but read incessantly.'²⁹³ The results of this isolation and incessant reading were seen by Coleridge in retrospect as entirely negative: 'before I was eight years old I was a *character* -sensitivity, imagination, vanity, sloth & feelings of deep & bitter contempt for almost all who traversed the orbit of my understanding, were even then prominent & manifest.'²⁹⁴ This ruthless, albeit possibly exaggerated, self-analysis provides a corrective to Wordsworth's view of Coleridge as a child snatched from a rural idyll to be raised in 'the great City, 'mid far other scenes'.²⁹⁵ Coleridge at this stage remembered himself as being at least as unhappy at Ottery as he was in London, however much he and Wordsworth

mocked by Samuel Johnson for its simplistic language, but, as noted above, was quoted admiringly by Wordsworth in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.

²⁹² Coleridge, *Letters* I, 347. *The Hermit; or, The Unparalleled Sufferings, and Surprising Adventures, of Philip Quarll* (1727) is an adventure story of a castaway, derived from Robinson Crusoe. It was hugely popular, going through eleven editions between 1759 and 1783.

²⁹³ Coleridge, *Letters* I, 347. As I explain in Chapter four, Hazlitt's precocity in reading had similar causes, and similar results. De Quincey also attributed his love of reading to a lack of childhood companions; see Chapter five.

²⁹⁴ Coleridge, *Letters* I, 348.

²⁹⁵ Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book II, lines 677-678.

later idealized his rural childhood. Coleridge's analysis of the effects of his early over-reading and inactivity informs his later criticisms of child 'prodigies', who, educated beyond their understanding, gain an inflated idea of their own importance.

Coleridge at Christ's Hospital

Coleridge's letters to Poole go up to the point when, in 1781, at the age of nine, he was sent to CH on the death of his father. The sequence of autobiographical letters was broken by the death of Poole's brother in May 1798, and Coleridge did not return to autobiography until the publication of *Biographia Literaria* in 1817, though he had planned an autobiographical work as early as 1803. CH in Coleridge's time, and for over a century following, was essentially three schools, teaching around seven hundred boys in a group of buildings on the site of the Greyfriars Monastery in the City of London. After an initial assessment at the junior branch of the school, based with the girls' school at Hertford, the brightest pupils went to the Grammar School, where the teaching focused on Greek and Latin to the exclusion of almost everything else. Leigh Hunt, for example, reported that as a Grammar School pupil 'a boy might arrive at the age of fifteen [...] and not know his multiplication-table; which was the case with myself.'²⁹⁶ Coleridge also struggled with mathematics all his life, and in his *Notebooks and Marginalia* frequently expresses his regret at having neglected his studies of the subject. In a marginal note to Jakob Boehme's *Works* (1764-81), addressed to his sons, he laments: 'such glorious opportunities, both at School [...] and at Jesus College, Cambridge [...] all *neglected* with still greater

²⁹⁶ James Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography*, ed. by Edmund Blunden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), p. 81.

remorse!’²⁹⁷ As he puts it in *Table Talk*, ‘[A] gentleman’s education [was] incomplete without [mathematics] and had himself found the necessity of getting up a little, when he could ill spare the time.’ He ‘every day more and more lamented his neglect of them when at Cambridge.’²⁹⁸ It is interesting to compare Coleridge’s view of mathematics as an indispensable part of a ‘gentleman’s education’ with Wordsworth’s opinion that reading was a ‘gentlemanly occupation’ (see Chapter two), and with the somewhat dismissive view of mathematics of De Quincey and John Stuart Mill (see Chapters five and six).

Coleridge’s memoirs of CH, scattered around his *Notebooks*, *Biographia Literaria*, and in James Gillman’s *Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (1838) were, for the most part, written or collated long after the event. Coleridge often tells the same anecdote in slightly different forms, and usually improves the tale in the process, so it is necessary to look at others’ memories of the school to gain some perspective. The most thorough and perhaps the most useful memoir was written by William Pitt Scargill, who attended CH from 1794 to 1802. The chief advantage of Scargill’s book, *Recollections of a Blue-coat Boy* (1829), is his matter-of-fact tone.²⁹⁹ He tells of his schooldays with a mature detachment and an adult’s perspective on the cruelties and privations that undoubtedly existed during his time at the school, but which he feels have been exaggerated by others. His book gives a useful insight into what CH was like for an ordinary boy, rather than a prodigy such as Coleridge.

²⁹⁷ Coleridge, *Collected Works* XII, *Marginalia I, Abbt to Byfield*, ed by George Whalley (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 615.

²⁹⁸ Coleridge, *Collected Works* XIV, *Table Talk*, ed by Carl Woodring (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), II, 298-99

²⁹⁹ William Pitt Scargill, *Recollections of a Blue-coat Boy* (Swaffham: F. Skill, 1829; reprinted Wakefield: S. R. Publishers Ltd., 1968).

Charles Lamb's CH essays

Charles Lamb, whose time at CH overlapped with Coleridge, wrote two essays about the school, both of which show signs of significant input from Coleridge. The two essays, very different in tone, reflect Coleridge's profoundly ambivalent response to his time at CH. Lamb's first essay about CH, published in 1813 in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, as 'On Christ's Hospital, and the Character of Christ's Hospital Boys', re-titled 'Recollections of Christ's Hospital' in his *Collected Essays*, is essentially a defence of the school's ethos at the time of the Waithman controversy (see below). It is almost entirely congratulatory in tone, reading very much like a prospectus for the school, and focusing as much on the character of the boys as on the school itself. One passage in particular is interesting in the light of Coleridge's comments on his younger self in his letters to Poole:

I have seen [...] the change which has been produced upon a boy of eight or nine years of age, upon being admitted into that school; how, from a pert young coxcomb, who thought that all knowledge was comprehended within his shallow brains, because a smattering of two or three languages and one or two sciences were stuffed into him by injudicious treatment at home [...] is contented to be carried on in the quiet orbit of modest self-knowledge in which the common mass of that unpretentious assemblage of boys seem to move: from being a little unfeeling mortal, he has got to feel and reflect.³⁰⁰

It is possible to detect the hand of Coleridge at several other points in this essay. One section begins: 'The Christ's Hospital or Blue-coat boy, has a distinctive character of his own, as far removed from the abject qualities of a common charity-boy as it is

³⁰⁰ Charles Lamb, 'Recollections of Christ's Hospital', *Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. by E. V. Lucas (London: Methuen, 1903), I, 139-149 (p. 143).

from the disgusting forwardness of a lad brought up at some other of the public schools.’³⁰¹ This closely echoes the wording of an article written by Coleridge for *The Courier* two years previously: ‘[CH boys] are distinguished by their civility, good manners, and modest pride, at equi-distance from the rudeness and insolence of the great public schools, and the abject manners of the common charity children.’³⁰² Coleridge, as the son of a clergyman, was always very sensitive about his status as a ‘gentleman’, and this distinction between CH boys and ‘common charity children’ was particularly important to him. Leigh Hunt, also noticing this distinction between CH pupils and ‘charity boys [...] for whom we all had a great contempt’, shrewdly remarks: ‘We did not dare to know that there might have been a little jealousy of our own position in it, placed as we were midway between the homeliness of the common charity school and the dignity of the foundations.’³⁰³ Another section of Lamb’s essay states: ‘For the Christ’s Hospital boy feels that he is no charity-boy; [...] he feels it in his education, in that measure of classical attainments, which [...] it would be worse than folly to put [...] in the reach of the labouring classes to acquire.’³⁰⁴ This is close to Coleridge’s remark in his *Courier* essay of 15 July 1811 that allowing the children of the ‘labouring class’ into CH would only serve to ‘lift them into a class [...] where, in 19 cases out of 20, they would be worse than

³⁰¹ Charles Lamb, ‘Recollections of Christ’s Hospital’, p. 141.

³⁰² Coleridge, ‘Christ’s Hospital’, *Collected Works III, Essays on his times in the Morning Post and The Courier*, ed. by David V. Erdman (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), II, 225-228 (p. 227).

³⁰³ Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography*, p. 89. Children from ‘common charity schools’ were regarded as figures worthy of ridicule; see for example Dickens’ portrait of ‘Rob the Grinder’ in *Dombey and Son* (1848).

³⁰⁴ Charles Lamb, ‘Recollections of Christ’s Hospital’, p. 140.

useless.’³⁰⁵ Essentially, this is a continuation of the view of earlier conservative writers on education that ‘too much’ education would be ‘worse than useless’ for the lower classes, as discussed in Chapter one. As explained below, however, Coleridge was open to the idea of social mobility via education.

Interestingly, in view of Coleridge’s stated preference for ‘imaginary’ fiction for children over ‘moral tales’, Lamb’s first CH essay also identifies in CH boys ‘a turn for romance above most other boys. [...] Hence the peculiar avidity with which such books as *The Arabian Nights Entertainments*, and others of a still wilder cast, are, or at least were in my time, sought for by the boys.’³⁰⁶ This taste for romantic fiction is noted in other contemporary and later memoirs; Scargill, for example, records: ‘We had the greatest interest in romances, especially those which had to do with the crusades, or the wars of the barons [...] that which we read by stealth had greater charms for us than that which was in the regular course of our business.’³⁰⁷ A slightly later CH pupil remembers ‘[S]ome favourite tale-teller, who would relate marvellous stories of knights, and ladies, with much about genii, fairies and witches. [...] I have often thought that [...] *Christabel* was an outcome of these romantic entertainments.’ The same writer also remembers books being smuggled illicitly into the school at the risk of a flogging, the favourites being ‘romances of enchanted castles; of beautiful women, the prisoners of tyrants; of subterraneous passages and solitary cells.’³⁰⁸

³⁰⁵ Coleridge, ‘Christ’s Hospital’, p. 226.

³⁰⁶ Charles Lamb, ‘Recollections of Christ’s Hospital’, p. 142.

³⁰⁷ Scargill, p. 104.

³⁰⁸ T. G. Hake, ‘Memoirs of Eighty Years’, quoted in Blunden et al., *The Christ’s Hospital Book*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953), p. 155.

David Russell compares and contrasts Lamb/Elia's view of education as revealed in this essay with that of Bentham, as described in *Chrestomathia*, pointing out that Bentham was particularly critical of the type of education provided by CH.³⁰⁹ Russell contrasts Bentham's proposed system, which 'requires an attitude of constant vigilance from everyone in the classroom' and thus 'blurs the distinction between student and teacher', with the aim of developing a 'total scheme of learning', to Elia's 'completely unsystematic' education at CH, where only a 'vague sensibility' is instilled.³¹⁰ As Russell points out, Lamb/Elia juxtaposes the two pedagogical styles in his 1821 essay 'The Old and the New Schoolmaster', portraying himself as someone with 'desultory and unmethodical learning' who, during a long coach journey, is besieged with requests for specific information by a modern schoolmaster, who, in contrast to Elia's own, more civilized schoolmasters, is incapable of 'genial conversation'.³¹¹ However, Russell does not consider in detail Lamb's second CH essay, 'Christ's Hospital Five-and-Thirty Years Ago', written under his pen-name Elia, and first published in the *London Magazine* of November 1820, which provides a useful corrective to the 1813 article, both in terms of the type of

³⁰⁹ David Russell, *Tact: Aesthetic Liberalism and the Essay Form in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2018), pp. 35-39. In his 'Notes to Chrestomathic Tables', Bentham writes: 'At Christ's Hospital, for example, to two or three years consumed in learning the rudiments of Latin grammar, succeeded by two or three years which are employed in forgetting those rudiments.' Jeremy Bentham, *Chrestomathia*, in *Collected Works*, ed. by M. J. Smith and W. H. Burston (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), pp. 42-43. Bentham's description of the teaching of the Classics at CH echoes that of former CH pupils, including Lamb, who, in the persona of Elia, wrote of his time at CH: 'We might take two years in getting through the verbs deponent, and another two in forgetting all about them.' Charles Lamb, 'Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago', *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb* II, 12-22 (p. 18).

³¹⁰ Russell, p. 38.

³¹¹ Russell, pp. 38-39.

education provided by CH, and in the character of its teachers. Matthew Field, for example, the Master of the Lower Grammar School, is portrayed as a 'good easy man' who 'came among us, now and then, but often staid away whole days from us.'³¹² Field's lackadaisical approach to teaching, whilst appreciated by his pupils as preferable to the harsh discipline imposed by the Headmaster, James Boyer, is unambiguously described by Lamb/Elia as an 'abuse'.³¹³

Lamb's second CH essay is altogether a much darker piece, portraying the school as a nightmarish place dominated by fear, hunger and favouritism. The author satirizes Lamb's eulogy for the school in his earlier essay: 'It happens, very oddly, that my own standing at Christ's was nearly corresponding with his; and [...] I think he has contrived to bring together whatever can be said in praise of [the school], dropping all the other side of the argument most ingeniously.' The narrator points out that Lamb was, in many ways, a privileged pupil: 'His friends lived in town, and were near at hand; and he had the privilege of going to see them, almost as often as he wished, through some invidious distinction, which was denied to us', and he was also able to supplement the school's meagre food with home-baked bread and other delicacies.³¹⁴ The narrator, a 'poor, friendless boy' from the West Country (fictionalized as Calne in Wiltshire), was sent to the school at the age of seven: 'My parents, and those who should care for me, were far away. Those few acquaintances of theirs, which they could reckon upon being kind to me in the great city [...] soon

³¹² Charles Lamb, 'Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago', p. 18.

³¹³ Charles Lamb, 'Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago', p. 19.

³¹⁴ Charles Lamb, 'Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago', p. 12.

grew tired of my holiday visits.’³¹⁵ The narrator suffered particularly on holidays: ‘The long warm days of summer never return but they bring with them a gloom from the haunting memory of those *whole-day-leaves*, when [...] we were turned out, for the live-long day, upon our own hands, whether we had friends to go to, or none.’³¹⁶ This echoes Coleridge’s comment in his *Notebooks* of ‘when not quite well having all those uneasy feelings which I had at School/feelings of Easter Monday &c.’³¹⁷ However, another *Notebook* entry suggests that such ‘holiday’ feelings pre-dated Coleridge’s time at CH:

It is a subject not unworthy of meditation to myself, what the reason is that these sounds & bustles of Holidays, Fairs, Easter-Mondays, & Tuesdays, & Christmas Days, even when I was a Child & when I was at Christ-Hospital, always made me so heart-sinking, so melancholy? Is it [...] That by poor Frank’s dislike of me when a little Child I was even from Infancy forced to be by myself?’³¹⁸

It is important to bear in mind Coleridge’s tendency to self-pity when reading such reports of his friendlessness at school. To put them into perspective, writing to his brother Luke when aged fourteen, Coleridge comments that ‘Miss Cabrier and my Cousin Bowdon behave more kindly to me than I can express. I dine there every

³¹⁵ Charles Lamb, ‘Christ’s Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago’, p. 13.

³¹⁶ Charles Lamb, ‘Christ’s Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago’, p. 13.

³¹⁷ Coleridge, *Notebooks* I, 1794-1804, ed. by Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), note 1176.

³¹⁸ Coleridge, *Notebooks* II, 1804-1808, ed. by Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), Note 2647. ‘Poor Frank’ was Coleridge’s older brother, who served with the British Army in India, and shot himself in a ‘delirium of fever’ aged twenty-two.

Saturday.’³¹⁹ Moreover, for most of Coleridge’s time at the school, one or other of his brothers George or Luke was also living in London.

The ‘friendless boy’ from Calne is made to witness the punishments inflicted on boys who have attempted to run away from school, and here the tone is reminiscent of descriptions of the dungeons of the Inquisition in Gothic novels:

As a novice I was soon after taken to see the dungeons. These were little, square, Bedlam cells, where a boy could just lie at his length upon straw and a blanket [...] with a peep of light, let in askance. [...] Here the poor boy was locked in by himself all day, without sight of any but the porter who brought him his bread and water – who *might not speak to him* [...] - here he was shut up by himself *of nights*, out of the reach of any sound, to suffer whatever horrors the weak nerves, and superstition incident to his time of life, might subject him to.³²⁰

Any boy who ran away a third time was expelled from the school: ‘The culprit [...] was brought forth, as at some solemn *auto da fe*, arrayed in uncouth and most appalling attire.’ Following a flogging in front of the whole school ‘he was made over to his friends, if he had any [...] or to his parish officer who [...] had his station allotted to him on the outside of the hall gate.’³²¹ Scargill records similar punishments for runaways, though by his time the practice of locking up boys in dungeons overnight had ended; the culprits were allowed to sleep in their

³¹⁹ Coleridge, *Letters* I, 3.

³²⁰ Charles Lamb, ‘Christ’s Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago’, pp. 16-17.

³²¹ Charles Lamb, ‘Christ’s Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago’, p. 17.

dormitory, but a wooden cage was put around their bed.³²² A footnote to Lamb's essay explains the reason for the change: 'One or two instances of lunacy, or attempted suicide [...] convinced the governors of the impolicy of this part of the sentence, and the midnight torture of the spirits was dispensed with.'³²³

Lamb's second CH essay also contains his famous evocation of Coleridge as the '*inspired charity-boy*' who entranced passers-by through the school's cloisters by unfolding 'the mysteries of Jamblichus, or Plotinus [...] or reciting Homer in his Greek, or Pindar.'³²⁴ As James Treadwell points out in his article on Lamb's two CH essays, the tone of the second essay varies uneasily as Lamb/Elia switches between himself as subject and narrator.³²⁵ Treadwell comments that the 'veracity' of the narrator's recollections of his childhood 'is of course sheer impersonation (Lamb was of course not brought up in Wiltshire, nor is there any evidence elsewhere that Elia was either)', but he seems to miss the surely obvious point, that the 'poor, friendless West Country boy' was a thinly-disguised Coleridge: the same person in fact as the '*inspired charity-boy*', as Coleridge himself later admitted.³²⁶

³²² Scargill, pp. 128-29.

³²³ Charles Lamb, 'Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago', p. 17, n1.

³²⁴ Charles Lamb, 'Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago', p. 21.

³²⁵ James Treadwell, 'Impersonation and Autobiography in Lamb's Christ's Hospital Essays', *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 37:4 (Winter, 1998), 499-521 (p. 515).

³²⁶ Or so at least Coleridge told Gillman. See Edmund Blunden and Earl Leslie Griggs (eds.) *Coleridge: Studies by Several Hands on the Hundredth Anniversary of His Death* (London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1934), p. 67. In Gillman's words 'nearly the whole [of Lamb's essay] is a transcript of Coleridge's account' of his early recollections of CH.

Discipline at CH

Flogging was the normal punishment at CH. Coleridge claimed to have been often flogged by Boyer, who sometimes added extra strokes 'because you are so ugly.' The only one of these floggings that Coleridge regarded as 'just' was given when he went to Boyer at the age of thirteen or so, saying that he wanted to leave the school to become apprenticed to a shoemaker, who accompanied Coleridge to the interview with Boyer. It was not uncommon for less academic CH boys to apprentice themselves to tradesmen in this way, but unheard of for a Grammar School boy to do so. Boyer dismissed the shoemaker ('pushed him rudely out of the room' according to Coleridge) and asked Coleridge why he wanted to leave the school. Coleridge replied that he did not want to become a clergyman as he had lost his faith. Boyer was not impressed: 'So, sirrah, you are an infidel, are you? Then I'll flog your infidelity out of you.'³²⁷ Coleridge remarked about the flogging: 'Boyer flogged me well, and I think wisely. Any Evangelical whining or remonstrances would have gratified my vanity, and confirmed me in my absurdity; as it was, I got laughed at and ashamed.'³²⁸ In general, both Coleridge and Scargill are philosophical and pragmatic about floggings. Scargill points out that 'the grammars and elementary books of that time were so very dull and difficult, and required so much

³²⁷ Holmes, *Early Visions*, p. 30. Holmes refers to the shoemaker as 'a Mr Crispin', but Coleridge's reference to the shoemaker as 'Crispin' is surely generic, St Crispin being the patron saint of shoemakers.

³²⁸ Coleridge, *Collected Works* XIV, *Table Talk* I, 144. The story of this 'just' flogging is told twice by Coleridge. In the version of the event recorded in *Table Talk*, the wish to become apprenticed to the shoemaker and the loss of faith are combined; in the other version, quoted in Gillman's biography and repeated by Holmes, the flogging for the loss of faith comes later, when Coleridge had been reading atheistic writers such as Cato and Voltaire. In any event, the effect of the flogging did not last long enough to maintain Coleridge's orthodoxy once he went to Cambridge.

labour in learning, that very few boys [...] could be induced to such books without the use of great severity.’³²⁹ This echoes the statement of Coleridge in *The Friend* that ‘where no interest previously exists, attention (as every schoolmaster knows) can be procured only by terror: which is the true reason why the majority of mankind learn nothing systematically, except as schoolboys or apprentices.’³³⁰ However, the lesson that both Coleridge and Scargill drew from this was the need to engage children’s interest in the subject matter, rather than flogging them into learning.

Another common theme that emerges from several CH memoirs, and to which Coleridge also referred in his lectures, is the sheer amount of wasted time. Scargill was demoted from the Grammar to the Writing School because he had neglected his studies, despite having ample time in which to complete them. At the Writing School, almost nothing was learnt and the boys had even more time on their hands: ‘The quantity we had to do in the course of the day was six copies and two sides of ciphering; and as we were in school eight hours, there was a great abundance of time allowed for doing this work [...] So very lenient was the system, that what was not done one day might be done on another.’³³¹ This lax attitude, in Scargill’s view, positively encouraged procrastination. In Coleridge’s case, as he reported in one of his lectures on education: ‘a habit of procrastinating was easily acquired – the Lecturer could trace it in himself, when 3 hours were allowed at school to learn what he could attain in 15 minutes.’³³² Coleridge, however, as well as being academically

³²⁹ Scargill, p. 50.

³³⁰ Coleridge, ‘Essay II’, *Collected Works* IV, *The Friend* I, 17.

³³¹ Scargill, p. 135.

³³² Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, *Lectures 1808 – 1819 on Literature*, I, 586.

gifted, was blessed with an unusually retentive memory, an invaluable gift when so much learning was by rote.³³³ As discussed below, Coleridge, in his lectures, was insistent on the vital importance of avoiding empty hours in children's education.

Coleridge's early ideas about education

In his early, radical years Coleridge, along with many of his contemporaries, shared a belief derived from Rousseau in the natural goodness of man, which was corrupted by money and the ownership of property. Coleridge and Southey corresponded on educational theories when, in the early 1790s, they were developing their plans for a 'Pantisocratic' community in the United States, where all would be equal and goods and land would be owned in common. Coleridge, following Rousseau, stressed the importance of early impressions when bringing up children born into the Pantisocratic community. He wrote to Southey about the possible adverse influence of older children, including Southey's brothers, on younger children: 'Are they not already *deeply* tinged with the prejudices and errors of Society? Have they not learnt from their Schoolfellows *Fear* and *Selfishness* – of which the necessary offspring are Deceit, and desultory Hatred? *How* are we to prevent them from infecting the minds of *our* Children?'³³⁴ Even at this early stage, Coleridge emphasized that truth must be at the heart of an ideal educational system:

³³³ Charles le Grice, a CH and Cambridge contemporary, recalled Coleridge at Cambridge being able to memorize Burke's latest pamphlets in the morning and then repeat whole pages of them verbatim in the evening. See *Coleridge the Talker*, ed. by Richard W. Armour and Raymond F. Howes (New York: Cornell University Press, 1940), pp. 281-82.

³³⁴ Coleridge, *Letters*, I, 119-20. Coleridge's original idea had been that young couples only would form the community, raising any children subsequently born to them on Pantisocratic principles.

'The *Heart* should have *fed* upon the *truth*, as Insects on a Leaf, till it be tinged with the colour, and shew it's [sic] food in every [sic] the minutest fibre.'³³⁵

In contrast to his later insistence on religious instruction, based on the teachings of the Church of England, being at the heart of children's education, Coleridge was at this time particularly insistent on the need to *avoid* any formal religious education of children. Writing to Southey on the risk of older children influencing younger ones, he asked: '*How* can we ensure their silence concerning *God* &c - ? Is it possible, *they* should enter into our *motives* for this silence? If not we must produce their *obedience* by *Terror*. *Obedience? Terror?* The Repetition is sufficient – I need not inform you, that they are as inadequate as inapplicable.'³³⁶ He added in a later letter: 'I wish [...] that the two Mothers [Mrs Fricker and Southey's mother] were *not* to go and that the [older] children stayed with them [...] *That* Mrs Fricker – we shall have her teaching the Infants *Christianity*, – I mean that mongrel whelp that goes under it's [sic] name – teaching them by stealth in some ague-fit of Superstition!'³³⁷

The Pantisocratic scheme was quickly abandoned in the light of contradictory opinions amongst its potential participants about where it should be located and how it should be run. Coleridge's concerns, however, highlight the central problem at the heart of a Rousseau-inspired educational system; how can, or should, the infant mind be guided towards truth (however defined) and protected from the 'prejudices and errors' of society without the use of 'Terror'? Rousseau's answer was to closely

³³⁵ Coleridge, *Letters*, I, 115.

³³⁶ Coleridge, *Letters* I, 120.

³³⁷ Coleridge, *Letters* I, 123.

supervise the child at all times, without letting the child know that it was being supervised, but this presupposes a single dedicated tutor who was permanently available, not to mention a singularly unobservant child. In this respect, if in no other, Coleridge continued to agree with Rousseau. In a footnote to the section of *The Statesman's Manual* (1816) dealing with national education, he writes 'The true perfection of discipline in a school is – The maximum of watchfulness with the minimum of punishment.'³³⁸ This points to one of the main drawbacks of the CH mode of education from Coleridge's point of view; the maximum of punishment was combined with the minimum of watchfulness.

Coleridge's views on mass education during his Unitarian phase were stated publically in a sermon he gave in Nottingham, on behalf of the Dissenting Academy there.³³⁹ After praising the institution of Sunday Schools, which in his view would (and should) lead eventually to 'a national education', Coleridge goes on to state that the only conservative objection to this outcome he had heard was that: 'Ignorance is necessary in order to keep the common people in obedience, and that Sunday Schools by removing this Ignorance unfit them for their status in Life.'³⁴⁰ He then comments on the dangers that accompany ignorance: 'A man cannot be always labouring – he must have hours of relaxation – but our nature abhors vacancy – and it is Knowledge alone that makes leisure a blessing.' Lacking such knowledge, 'the

³³⁸ Coleridge 'The Statesman's Manual', *Collected Works* VI, *Lay Sermons*, ed. by R. J. White (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 40 & n. This is perhaps also the only point upon which Coleridge would have agreed with the Benthamite reformers, who advocated constant surveillance during education.

³³⁹ Coleridge *Collected Works* I, *Lectures 1795 On Politics and Religion*, ed. by Peter Mann and Lewis Patton (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), pp. 346-56.

³⁴⁰ Coleridge *Collected Works* I, 354.

ignorant labourer flies to the ale-house', exposing his family to 'the disorders which arise from cold & hunger', with possible risks to the whole neighbourhood from 'pestilence'.³⁴¹ Additional risks of ignorance he mentions are 'Superstition' and 'political fanaticism'.³⁴² Despite his later move away from Unitarianism and radicalism, and his reservations about 'too much' education, Coleridge continued to maintain that a much greater danger to society came from ignorance than from education.

Another insight into Coleridge's views on education during his radical phase is provided by his article 'Pitt and Bonaparte: Pitt', first published in the *Morning Post* on 19 March 1800.³⁴³ The essay is scathing in its criticism of Pitt, and Coleridge attributes what he sees as Pitt's failings to his upbringing and education. In Coleridge's words: 'A palpable election, a conscious predestination controlled the free agency, and transfigured the individuality of his mind; and that, which he *might have been*, was compelled into that, which he *was to be*.'³⁴⁴ Not only this, the mode of Pitt's education led to what, in Coleridge's view, was a disastrous separation in Pitt's mind between words and objects:

From his early childhood it was his father's custom to make him stand up on a chair, and declaim before a large company; by which exercise [...] he acquired a premature and unnatural dexterity in the combination of words, which

³⁴¹ Coleridge *Collected Works* I, 355.

³⁴² Coleridge *Collected Works* I, 356.

³⁴³ Coleridge, 'Pitt and Bonaparte: Pitt', *Collected Works* III, I, 220-27. The companion piece on Napoleon was advertised, but never published.

³⁴⁴ Coleridge, 'Pitt and Bonaparte: Pitt', p. 219.

must of necessity have diverted his attention from present objects, obscured his impressions, and deadened his genuine feelings.³⁴⁵

The result was: 'A being, who had no feelings connected with man or nature, no spontaneous impulses, no unbiased and desultory studies, no genuine science, nothing that constitutes individuality in intellect, nothing that teaches brotherhood in affection!'³⁴⁶ It is of course possible that in later years, given his own return to orthodoxy, Coleridge would come to think enviously of 'a young man whose feet had never wandered; whose very eye had never turned to the right or to the left'.³⁴⁷

Hazlitt consistently praised the essay on Pitt, and indeed Coleridge's criticisms of Pitt's education are not dissimilar to those of Hazlitt's of a later Prime Minister, George Canning, whom he regarded as little more than a clever schoolboy.³⁴⁸

It is clear from his lectures and writing on education that, despite his public loyalty to the school, and his gratitude for the education he received there, Coleridge had serious reservations about both what was taught at CH, and, more particularly,

³⁴⁵ Coleridge, 'Pitt and Bonaparte: Pitt', p. 220.

³⁴⁶ Coleridge, 'Pitt and Bonaparte: Pitt', p. 221. Coleridge's use of the word 'desultory' (also used by Lamb in 'The Old and New Schoolmaster') is interesting. It seems to have meant then more or less what it means now: 'Pursuing a disconnected and irregular course of action; unmethodical'.
<<http://www.oed.com.bris.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/51148?redirectedFrom=desultory#eid>> [Accessed 4 March 2017]. An OED citation from 1838 warns that 'Desultory reading is indeed most mischievous, by fostering habits of loose discontinuous thought.' Wordsworth's studies whilst at Cambridge could be described as 'desultory'; as explained in Chapter two, once he had decided not to study for an honours degree in preparation for a Fellowship, Wordsworth read only what he wanted to read. The same was true of De Quincey's course of reading at Oxford; see Chapter five.

³⁴⁷ Coleridge, 'Pitt and Bonaparte: Pitt', p. 221.

³⁴⁸ Hazlitt, 'Conversations with Northcote: Conversation the Twenty-First', *Complete Works XI, The Spirit of the Age and Conversations of James Northcote, Esq., R.A.*, ed by P. P. Howe (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1932), pp. 309-16 (p. 316).

how it was taught. In his lectures he drew on his own childhood experiences to highlight what the problems had been. The overall effect was that for much of his time at CH Coleridge was desperately unhappy; he had nightmares about CH for several decades after he left, and he records in his *Notebooks* that he was haunted by memories of the school 'whenever he was in low spirits.'³⁴⁹ Drawing on his unhappy memories of CH, Coleridge in his lectures identified several key requirements for an education that would, in a phrase in his *Notebooks*, 'breed up children to be happy.'³⁵⁰ Firstly, and most importantly, it was essential for love and truth to be at the heart of education. Secondly, education should be tailored to suit the needs and abilities of each child. Thirdly, children's memory and imagination should be fostered, particularly through contact with nature, but they should not be expected or forced to exercise moral judgement too early. Fourthly, children should not be left idle or unoccupied for long periods. Finally, punishments should be kept to a minimum and, if required at all, should not be humiliating or degrading.

Until he came across the ideas of Andrew Bell in around 1808, Coleridge had for the most part been sceptical about contemporary educational theorists. After the birth of his first child, Coleridge had recommended to his wife Maria Edgeworth's *Practical Education*, suggesting however that it be taken with a pinch of salt, as 'there are very good things in the work - & some nonsense!'³⁵¹ In particular, Coleridge would have shared Edgeworth's concern that words be rigorously paired with

³⁴⁹ Jennifer Ford in *Coleridge on Dreaming* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 71-76, examines and analyzes several of what Coleridge described as his 'Christ-Hospitalized' dreams and nightmares.

³⁵⁰ Coleridge, *Notebooks* I, Note 1176.

³⁵¹ Coleridge, *Letters* I, 418.

‘uniformly distinct ideas’, precision of language being a continual priority for Coleridge, as he saw it as indispensable to truth-telling. He would, for the same reason, have sympathised with Edgeworth’s wish to avoid the ‘pious frauds’ advocated by Rousseau. However, as discussed below, Coleridge would have fundamentally disagreed with Edgeworth’s conclusion that children should not be allowed to read ‘imaginative literature’, such as fairy tales and poetry, and should instead read only ‘improving’ stories and factual works.

This objection to imaginative literature was a common factor amongst eighteenth-century writers on education. Hannah More, for example, had angered Coleridge by stating in *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799) that poets, who, ‘always ready to lend a hand when any mischief is to be done, have contributed their full share towards confirming these feminine follies’, which follies More had previously described as ‘affected sensibility’, ‘self-indulgence’, ‘idleness’, ‘capricious humours’ and ‘feigned simplicity’. Coleridge commented on these remarks in his *Notebooks*:

NB Poets [...] having nothing to do with the *action* as determined by Law, but only with the feelings leading to & accompanying it – Deductions from this, & strictures on the silly Observation of Miss Hannah More that Poets are always ready to aid Mischief [...] The poet lives in an element, in which Property is no further recognized than as it affects the Imagination, or produces states of moral Activity – or Intensity.³⁵²

Despite differing so violently from Hannah More on this particular matter, Coleridge sought out a meeting with her when in Bristol on a lecture tour, and subsequently

³⁵² Coleridge, *Notebooks III*, 1808-1819, ed. by Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), Note 3956.

praised her in a letter to Joseph Cottle dated 27 May 1814: 'It is no small gratification to me, that I have seen & conversed with Mrs H. More – She is indisputably the *first* literary female I ever met with – In part, no doubt, because she is a Christian.'³⁵³

Coleridge's ambivalence towards More reflects that towards Sarah Trimmer (see below). In both cases, Coleridge admired their general moral outlook, but took issue with what he saw as their philistine approach to literature. As Coburn notes, 'While [Coleridge] may have approved of [More's] disquisitions against frivolity and hardness of heart, he could not accept her puritanical detraction of the arts.'³⁵⁴ This ambivalence towards literature highlights another internal contradiction at the heart of Coleridge's ideas on education; if truth-telling is of paramount importance, why should children be allowed, indeed encouraged, to read fairy stories, which by their very nature cannot be true?

Coleridge's lectures on education

Coleridge expounded his ideas on education in four lectures on the subject given in Bristol and London in the period from 1808 to 1818 (several others were planned but not delivered). He had by this time moved away from the radical Unitarianism of his youth to a politically and religiously conservative position, advocating the primacy of the Church of England in all matters relating to education.

³⁵³ Coleridge, *Letters* III, ed. by Earl Leslie Briggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), pp. 499-500. Though at first wary of meeting Coleridge, More was charmed by his conversation, finding him 'very eloquent, entertaining and brimfull [sic] of knowledge'. Quoted in Stott, p. 300. Charles Howard Ford describes an 'unfriendly' meeting between Coleridge and More at some unspecified time in 'the 1790s', but provides no source of information for the meeting, which is not mentioned in Coleridge's letters or Notebooks. In any case, it would not be surprising if Coleridge, at that time a radical Unitarian, had been out of sympathy with More, an Evangelical Anglican. See Charles Howard Ford, *Hannah More: a Critical Biography* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), p. 262.

³⁵⁴ Coleridge, *Notebooks* III, Note 3956n.

Inextricably linked to his ideas, but in many ways a distraction from them, was his admiration for the work of Bell, and his opposition to the rival approach of Lancaster. As discussed in Chapter one, both Bell and Lancaster advocated a 'monitorial' system of education, in which older children taught younger children, schoolmasters having a mainly supervisory role. Although initially relations between the two were cordial, each at some point hinted that the other had stolen his ideas.³⁵⁵ Whatever the truth of such accusations, the main advantage claimed for both monitorial systems was that, by devolving routine teaching to older pupils, they enabled a large number of children to be educated by one teacher, which would enable the mass education of poorer children at a manageable cost. Bell also claimed that his approach enabled teaching to be tailored to the abilities of individual children and eliminated all wasted time, both key points in its favour from Coleridge's point of view.

Humphry Davy had since 1805 been inviting Coleridge to lecture on poetry at the Royal Institution, but Coleridge delayed accepting Davy's invitation until 1808. In his 'supernumerary lecture on education', given on 3 May 1808, Coleridge began by outlining what he saw as the 'cardinal rules' of early education; firstly, to work by love and so generate love, secondly, to habituate the mind to intellectual accuracy or truth and, thirdly, to excite power. He stressed that 'little is taught or communicated

³⁵⁵ In a strange echo of this dispute, Southey accused Coleridge of using unacknowledged material from his 1811 book on Bell's system, *Origin, Nature, and Object of the New System of Education*, for his 1813 lectures. There is indeed evidence from his letters and Notebooks that Coleridge borrowed the book before the lecture, but Coleridge had previously spoken about Bell's theories in his 1808 lecture at the Royal Institution, long before Southey's book was published, and he in turn claimed that 'Southey's book is a dilution of my lecture at the RI'. See R. A. Foakes' introductory notes in Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 96-102 and 578-9, which concisely summarize the complex background to both the Bell/Lancaster dispute, and the dispute between Coleridge and Southey.

by contest or dispute, but everything by sympathy and love. Collision elicits truth only from the hardest heads.’³⁵⁶ Distancing himself from what by this time he had come to see as the ‘negative’ educational ideas of Rousseau, Coleridge told his often-repeated anecdote about a ‘radical’ friend who had defended Rousseau. Coleridge had led the friend into his ‘miserably neglected garden, choked with weeds’, saying that it was ‘a garden [...] educated according to Rousseau’s principles.’³⁵⁷ This was a distortion of Rousseau’s ideas on education, as set out in *Emile*, which advocated close (albeit hidden) supervision of children at all times, rather than benign neglect, and was perhaps closer to William and Dorothy Wordsworth’s *laissez-faire* approach to educating the young Basil Montagu in the early 1790s (see Chapter two).

In Coleridge’s view all school children ‘lived in civil war with their masters’. Whilst they would be ‘disgraced by a lie told to their fellows’ children would always be inclined to see teachers as ‘the common enemy’, in dealing with whom lying was never regarded as dishonourable.³⁵⁸ As stated above, truth was, to Coleridge, of vital importance, and he suggested in the lecture that this could best be encouraged by parents encouraging strict accuracy of language in their children. If, for example, a parent heard his child call a round leaf ‘long’, he should correct it instantly. This approach would help the child develop the habit of telling the truth without needing to have any notion of ‘moral truth’. In Coleridge’s view, parents and teachers ‘should

³⁵⁶ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 105-06.

³⁵⁷ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 106.

³⁵⁸ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 106.

not early begin with impressing ideas of virtue [or] goodness which the child could not comprehend.’³⁵⁹

In his notes on this lecture, Foakes states that Coleridge ‘defended flogging and the use of the cane to discipline schoolboys’, but this is an over-simplification of Coleridge’s views.³⁶⁰ At this stage, Coleridge was at best lukewarm about corporal punishment (it is worth remembering in this context that he regarded only one of the many floggings he received from Boyer as ‘just’). Indeed, in the 1808 lecture he described the text “He that spareth the rod, spoileth the Child” as ‘a source of much evil’ and expressed doubts about the efficacy of corporal punishment: ‘it was a poor substitute for virtue and principle.’³⁶¹ Coleridge was, and remained, implacably opposed to what he called ‘ignominious’ punishments, claiming in this lecture that he himself was ‘still embittered by the recollection of humiliating punishments he suffered when a child. It came to him in disease and when his mind is dejected.’³⁶² In

³⁵⁹ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 106-07.

³⁶⁰ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 106 note 3.

³⁶¹ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 107. Attitudes to corporal punishment were gradually changing, so Coleridge’s views were not particularly radical or progressive for the time. As early as 1693, Locke urged using the “Rod” only ‘sparingly so as not to have children’s *Spirits*... abased or *broken* much’, and because the time would come ‘when they will be past the Rod, and Correction’. In 1775 Samuel Johnson had lamented the decline in whipping because it meant a decline in learning; in his words, ‘There is now less flogging in our great schools than formerly, but then less is learned there, so what the boys gain at one end, they lose at the other’ (Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, p. 662). Scargill, writing in 1825, tells his sons: ‘In former times, the severity of school discipline was much greater than it is now. If I were to relate to you the cruelties that were inflicted upon children in public schools many years ago, you would shudder to hear them.’ (Scargill, pp. 49-50). The use of corporal punishment varied; it was not used at Wordsworth’s school, Hawkshead Grammar School, or at Manchester Grammar School, where Thomas De Quincey was taught from the age of fifteen. Robert Southey was expelled from Westminster School for writing a pamphlet against flogging.

³⁶² Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 106.

Bell's system there was a 'punishment book' in which transgressions were recorded, with offenders being tried by a jury of schoolmates. In theory, corporal punishment could be used as a last resort, but Bell maintained that in practice behaviour at his schools was so good that it was never actually used.

In another theme he revisited in later lectures, Coleridge, echoing Dr Johnson, criticized 'improving' moralistic books for children, claiming that, firstly they made education 'too easy by far', and secondly, that they instilled vanity, rather than virtue; what Coleridge termed 'goody-ness'. Singling out the works of Maria Edgeworth for criticism, he said 'I infinitely prefer the little books of "The Seven Champions of Christendom", "Jack the Giant-Killer", etc., etc. – for at least they make the child forget himself – to your moral tales where a good little boy comes in and says "Mama, today I met a poor beggar man and gave him the sixpence you gave me yesterday, did I do right?" – "O yes, my dear, to be sure you did".' For Coleridge, the aim should always be to 'let the Child be good, and know it not.'³⁶³

The most controversial part of the 1808 lecture came towards the end, when Coleridge praised Bell's system and attacked Lancaster, accusing him of stealing Bell's ideas. Coleridge favoured Bell's approach over Lancaster's for several reasons. Most importantly, Bell's methods placed the teachings of the Church of England at the centre of education. Bell had claimed, in his book *The Madras System* (1808), that 'the parochial clergy' was the answer to the nation's educational needs, being 'an order of men formed, as it were, for the purpose.'³⁶⁴ This was a precursor to

³⁶³ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 107-08. *The Seven Champions of Christendom*, written by Richard Johnson in 1596, and reprinted many times, was a particular favourite of Samuel Johnson who, like Coleridge, much preferred it to 'moralizing' fiction for children.

³⁶⁴ Quoted in Duggett, p.158.

Coleridge's later idea of a 'clerisy'; an educated class, including, but not limited to, the clergy, which would lead society and help ensure social cohesion and political stability. Although religious instruction also formed a central part of Lancaster's curriculum, he adopted a non-denominational approach. In Coleridge's opinion, this would lead inexorably to Deism and ultimately to atheism amongst Lancaster's pupils.³⁶⁵ Finally, Lancaster's system involved a complicated system of punishments and rewards. The punishments used by Lancaster were unacceptable to Coleridge because of their 'shameful' nature, but he believed the rewards would be equally if not more damaging, encouraging toadyism and self-conscious 'goody-ness'. Lancaster's approach to rewards and punishments was favoured by radical Utilitarian reformers such as Jeremy Bentham and Henry Brougham, which was another reason for Coleridge and Southey to condemn it.

Coleridge caused considerable difficulties, both for himself and for Bell, by attacking Lancaster on a personal level instead of confining his criticism to Lancaster's theories and practices. He made two serious specific charges in the lecture; firstly, that Lancaster was guilty of 'religious intolerance' (an accusation which could equally be levelled at Coleridge himself), and secondly, that Lancaster had stolen Bell's ideas, a point which was at best debatable.³⁶⁶ Coleridge wrote two

³⁶⁵ This claim, of course, conveniently ignores the fact that Coleridge's own drift towards Deism followed a conventional Anglican education at CH and Cambridge.

³⁶⁶ In a letter to Bell, Coleridge claimed to have been warned against giving the lecture by one of Lancaster's 'zealots', who alleged that Bell had in fact stolen Lancaster's ideas and that a pamphlet proving this was 'in the press' (Coleridge, *Letters* III, 105). In fact, Bell himself had consistently acknowledged that the two monitorial systems had developed in parallel, and whilst expressing reservations about certain aspects of Lancaster's system, exonerated him from accusations of plagiarism.

apologetic letters to Bell shortly after the lecture, explaining why he had made these charges: 'The more I think, the more I do accord, with [...] Mrs Trimmer [...] that Lancaster's schools are a very dangerous attack on our civil and ecclesiastical establishments, at a time when they want all that support which [...] your system would give.'³⁶⁷ He also told Bell, somewhat disingenuously given the wording of the lecture, that he had carefully avoided making any personal criticism of Lancaster. The Royal Institution subsequently reprimanded Coleridge for breaking the Institution's rule forbidding 'any personal animadversions in lectures delivered there'. This provided Lancaster's supporters with the opportunity to claim that the Royal Institution had entirely discredited Coleridge's ideas. Coleridge subsequently complained bitterly to Daniel Stuart that in return for 'first daring to blow the Trumpet of sound Philosophy against the Lancastrian Faction' he had been 'Unthanked and left worse than defenceless by the Friends of the Government and the Establishment, to be undermined by all the malice, hatred & calumny' of Bell's opponents.³⁶⁸

In one of his series of lectures on Shakespeare, given in London from December 1811 to January 1812, Coleridge, to Lamb's bemusement, went into a long digression on the merits of Bell's system, and the demerits of Lancaster's, focusing again on the shaming punishments of the latter, compared to the milder approach of Bell.³⁶⁹ It is possible that Bell was in the audience for the lecture, which might

³⁶⁷ Coleridge, *Letters* III, 107.

³⁶⁸ Coleridge, *Letters* III, 532.

³⁶⁹ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 285-86. Lamb commented that 'It is a pity he did not leave this till he got to Henry VI and then he might say he could not help taking part against the Lancastrians'.

explain the digression.³⁷⁰ Coleridge said of Lancaster (without actually naming him): 'A man of great reputation (he should rather say notoriety) had punished those under his care [...] by suspending them from the ceiling in baskets to be the derision of his Schoolfellows.'³⁷¹ Coleridge also referred to another schoolmaster who, 'about 20 years ago' had placed an advertisement 'in which he assured the tender parents that he would use no corporal chastisement excepting in cases of absolute necessity & that even then it should be inflicted only with lilies & roses stripped of their thorns.'³⁷² Foakes in his footnotes takes this to be a reference to Bell, but this seems unlikely, given that Coleridge went on to condemn the unnamed schoolmaster's approach, because: 'In endeavouring to remove a pimple, the disease had been transferred to the very vitals.'³⁷³ Moreover, Bell's ideas had not reached a wide audience in Britain until 1807, only four years before the lecture; twenty years before the lecture, Bell was just beginning his work in Madras. The words might have been meant to refer to Lancaster and have been misplaced by the note-taker. Coleridge would certainly have regarded corporal punishment as the lesser of two evils compared to Lancaster's humiliating punishments. The words do, however, bear a close resemblance to Montaigne's criticism of corporal punishment in his essay 'On the Education of Children': 'How much more appropriate to strew [...]

³⁷⁰ Charles Cuthbert Southey, *Life of Bell* Volume II, pp. 645-47; Coleridge, *Letters* III, 842. Coleridge's letter to Bell is dated 30 November, and Bell's letter to Robert Southey, commenting enthusiastically on a lecture by Coleridge he had recently attended, is dated 14 December. Coleridge gave three lectures during that time, on 5, 9 and 12 December, and it is not possible to determine which of these Bell attended.

³⁷¹ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 285-86.

³⁷² Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, p. 285.

³⁷³ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, p. 285.

classrooms with leaf and flower, than with bloodstained birch-rods.’³⁷⁴ Revulsion against corporal punishment was one of the results of the growth in ‘sensibility’ during the latter half of the eighteenth century, and it may be that Coleridge was simply satirizing what he had come to see as excessive sentimentality towards children. As discussed in Chapter five, De Quincey, in many ways more politically conservative than Coleridge, was thoroughly opposed to all forms of corporal punishment.

In the first of two lectures on education he gave in Bristol in November 1813, Coleridge stated that if anything he said awoke ‘party feeling’ this would be because ‘it was forced upon him by a sense of duty imposed by the precepts of morality, not by a regard to names and circumstances.’³⁷⁵ Describing Bell’s ‘New System’, Coleridge pointed out that its key feature was ‘*Monitors*, or boys teaching boys, under the eye of a Superintendant [sic] or Schoolmaster’, whose role was not so much to teach, as ‘to observe that there was not a *deviation* from proper methods.’³⁷⁶ By thus bringing a number of children together, and ‘comparing their understandings, a *minimum* of acquirement might be attained.’ This approach would avoid the mistake made in his own school, where he was placed in the ‘*Dunces*’-row’, only being rescued from this ignominious position because an older boy noticed him reading Virgil’s *Eclogues* ‘which he had been taught to read before he went to school’ and brought this to the headmaster’s attention. Coleridge went on to argue for a system of teaching tailored to the individual child’s abilities: ‘in a state of

³⁷⁴ Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, translated and ed. by M. A. Screech (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 186.

³⁷⁵ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 583-84.

³⁷⁶ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 584.

progression, the art is to begin low enough: if a boy cannot learn three lines, give him two, if not two, one, if not one, half: the level of capacity must be found.³⁷⁷ This, however, left unanswered the question of what to do about a child, such as Coleridge himself, who was able but indolent; indeed, by his own admission he had deliberately got himself into the Dunces' row to avoid the hard work imposed by Boyer.

Coleridge claimed that one 'beauty' of Bell's system was that: 'its means call forth the moral energies of action; not merely as relates to acquirement of knowledge, but to fill those scenes which Providence may afterwards place them in.' As discussed below, Coleridge consistently criticized modern novels which, in his view, excited the 'mere feelings' only, without inspiring action.³⁷⁸ Reiterating the need to avoid 'cramming' children prematurely with knowledge, Coleridge stressed that a child should be 'child-like, and possess no other idea than what was loving and admiring.' He recalled how he himself had read poets such as Young and Gray and recollected the 'innocent and delightful intoxication with which he had read them.' Such feelings were, in Coleridge's opinion, 'as necessary to a future Poet, as the bud to the flower, or the flower to the seed.'³⁷⁹ Coleridge however saw such untutored admiration as merely a (necessary) first step; true appreciation would only come through education.

Coleridge went on to say that another advantage of the monitorial system was that 'it gave the Superintendent a power of precluding every thing of a

³⁷⁷ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 585.

³⁷⁸ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 585.

³⁷⁹ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 585.

procrastinating nature'. Drawing on his memories of time wasted at CH, Coleridge stressed the need to keep children occupied, saying that 'there should not be a single moment allowed a child in which it should not learn something – the moment it has done learning, it should play; the doing nothing was the great error; the time that children are rendered passive, is the time they are led into evil.' Again using the analogy of an untended garden becoming overgrown with weeds, he added that 'leaving a child to do nothing, was the surest way of exposing him to the ridiculous and false notion of equality; whilst constant employment was the best way of impressing upon his mind the order, extent and nature of gradations in society.'³⁸⁰

Later in the lecture, Coleridge explained how, in his view, the different classes of society should be taught, emphasising the need to match education to social status: 'In the first part of education there could be no difference; all moral and religious truths were essential to all; the middle classes were not only to be useful, but the higher the same; but to render the latter so, all that was needed was a different degree of *acquirement*, a gradation of acquisition of *language and knowledge*; proportionate to the sphere in which they were to move.'³⁸¹

Notwithstanding the need to avoid idleness, time should be allowed for unscheduled activities: 'Never, however, imagine that a child is idle who is gazing on the stream, or laying upon the earth; the basis of all moral character may then be forming; all the healthy process of nature may be ripening, but let the standard of action be the not leaving that for tomorrow which may be done today.'³⁸² This raises a question which

³⁸⁰ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 586.

³⁸¹ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 589.

³⁸² Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 586.

Coleridge left unanswered; how are adults to judge whether a child gazing on a stream or laying upon the earth is or is not being idle? As Foakes points out, Wordsworth also identifies, but does not resolve, this paradox in Book IX of *The Excursion*:

The thriving Prisoners of their Village school:
And thence let loose, to seek their pleasant homes,
Or range the grassy lawn in vacancy:
To breathe and to be happy, run and shout
Idle, – but no delay, no harm, no loss;³⁸³

Of course, for a ‘day-boy’ like Wordsworth, growing up in a rural society away from parental control, there was plenty of free time before and after school, which allowed for such unsupervised communing with nature without the loss of education. Wordsworth also took a much more sceptical view than Coleridge about the value of time spent in the classroom.

On the subject of books suitable for children, Coleridge again criticized openly moralistic books, saying that it was vitally important that children should ‘forget themselves’ and ‘books which only told how Master Billy and Miss Ann spoke and acted, were not only ridiculous but extremely hurtful; much better give them Jack the Giant-Killer, or the seven Champions, or any thing which, being beyond their own sphere of action, should not feed this self-pride.’³⁸⁴ In his *Notebooks* at around this time, Coleridge makes clear his continuing dissatisfaction with books written for children and books about education:

³⁸³ Foakes, ‘Thriving Prisoners’, p. 203; Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, Book IX, lines 260-65.

³⁸⁴ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 587.

So as to Books of Education – those written 150 years ago were at all events excellently adapted to the plan & objects of the Educators – but now! Scarcely half a dozen [...] Books of entertaining instruction, that can be confidently put into a Boy's or Girl's hands – and as to books of SCHOOLING – a blank.³⁸⁵

Elsewhere in the *Notebooks*, Coleridge singled out for criticism books with religious themes for children such as those written by Mrs Barbauld and Sarah Trimmer. In his view Mrs Barbauld, in attempting to give a 'religious splendour to the Man, Jesus', had provided instead something that 'is, part, insincere falsehood, meaning one thing & conveying another – and part, the Lord Mayor's Show - only not so well contrived.'³⁸⁶

Revisiting the subject of corporal punishment, Coleridge reiterated his view that, although better than humiliating forms of punishment, it was of limited value as a deterrent, because it was:

ridiculous to suppose that boys conceived any great shame attached to it, when they knew there perhaps is not a judge or a bishop on the bench, who had not undergone the same. [...] [T]hough it did no good, it never did harm, but was still preferable to the substitute of selfish rewards, which only fed self-love, and excited envy and bad passion.³⁸⁷

Without mentioning Lancaster by name, Coleridge referred scathingly to degrading punishments: 'to load a boy with fetters; to hang dying speeches about his neck, to expose him to the sneers and insults of his peers [...] was a pitiful mockery of human

³⁸⁵ Coleridge, *Notebooks* IV, 1819-1826, ed. by Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge, 1990), Note 5328.

³⁸⁶ Coleridge, *Notebooks* IV, Note 4707.

³⁸⁷ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 587.

nature: it must be the work of a superior grace, if a boy who has suffered such humiliation, ever afterward shuddered at a slave-ship, or any other act of barbarity.’³⁸⁸

Coleridge ended the lecture with a lyrical passage on human progress. He asked why the sight of an infant rarely fails to produce ‘a strong sensation’; for himself, it was because he ‘beheld a being capable of becoming wise and great, capable and desirous perhaps of alleviating human misery; capable of being a star amongst stars: – or [...] a being, from the absence or evil of his education, capable of blasting and withering like mildew.’ He emphasized the vital importance of education in this context:

Suppose it possible that there was a country, where [a] great part of its population had one arm rendered useless; who would not be desirous of relieving their distress; but what was a right arm withered, in comparison of having all the faculties shut out from the writings of the good and wise of past ages.³⁸⁹

Emphasizing the need to avoid forcing children into premature moralizing, and with perhaps a regretful view of his own solitary, bookish childhood, he concluded that ‘the ideas of a child were chearful [sic] and playful; they should not be palsied by obliging it to utter sentences which the head could not comprehend nor the heart echo; our nature was in every sense a *progress*; both body and mind.’³⁹⁰ Coleridge

³⁸⁸ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 588.

³⁸⁹ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 589.

³⁹⁰ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 589.

outlined his theory about the development of a child's mind in more detail in an article in *The Friend* (see below).

In the second 1813 lecture, Coleridge began by stressing the connection between 'intellectual accuracy' and 'moral veracity'; emphasising that the former should always precede the latter; 'for this end, boys should not be accustomed to utter words which they did not understand; having first used words of no meaning, they soon use those of half meaning, then those of vicious meaning.'³⁹¹ Expanding on this theme, he suggested that 'perhaps it would be better if children could never hear the words good or bad; if the child did wrong it should be told that it acted silly; the result of right being wisdom, of wrong folly; thus it would early attain the knowledge of cause and effect.'³⁹² No doubt recalling the long, tedious hours spent learning by rote at CH, Coleridge proposed doing away 'with all the Grammars now in use; they were a jargon of unmeaning words; not one in twenty of the schoolmasters understood them, much less their scholars.'³⁹³ (Interestingly, Andrew Bell produced a basic Latin grammar book for younger pupils, entitled *Ludus Literarius* (1815), using the books then in use at CH as examples).³⁹⁴

Another of Coleridge's recurring themes was the need to foster children's memory, and in this lecture he explained in detail what *type* of memory he thought should be fostered, distinguishing between 'passive memory', which often depended

³⁹¹ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 593.

³⁹² Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 593. Coleridge wrote to his younger son Derwent: '[A]lways [...] tell the Truth. For God gave you a Tongue to tell the Truth; and to tell a Lie with it is as silly, as to try to walk on your Head instead of your Feet.' (Coleridge, *Letters* III, 2).

³⁹³ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 593.

³⁹⁴ See Charles Cuthbert Southey, *Life of Bell Vol II*, pp. 304-06.

on an individual's health, and which might therefore be 'brilliant at one time, and dull at another', and what he termed 'logical memory'. Coleridge argued that 'the latter, founded on association, connects cause with effect, and will exist unimpaired by disease; its increase is an increase in intellect; it is *a memory made out of distinct truths, animated by sincere and vivid feelings*.'³⁹⁵ Coleridge's words were later echoed by Hazlitt, who was also fundamentally sceptical about the value of 'technical memory' and 'learning by rote' as measures of intelligence (see Chapter four).

In the second part of this lecture, Coleridge discussed the education of girls. Arguing that 'woman only could educate woman', he described Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), which advocated co-education, as 'a foolish book', because it ignored the fundamental differences between the male and female mind. He said that on 'any subject of taste, he would sooner appeal to the *tact* of an innocent woman, than to the wisest man; but in logical deduction, the dependence of cause and effect, and all subjects of thought, the man was superior.'³⁹⁶ He concluded that 'in that future state to which we were approaching, where all were to be in common, and difference of sex would not exist [...] the man would attain the *tact* or instinct of a woman, and the woman the thought and courage of the man.'³⁹⁷ Coleridge's views here are close to Hazlitt's, who similarly demarcated the areas in which he saw male and female minds as superior

³⁹⁵ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 594 (italics in original).

³⁹⁶ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 594.

³⁹⁷ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 594-95. In his notes on this lecture, Foakes suggests that this passage indicates that Coleridge's views on the future equality of the sexes were in fact even more 'radical' than Wollstonecraft's, but Coleridge's phrase 'that future state' surely refers to life after death, rather than some utopian future earthly life.

to each other; see Chapter four. In his *Notebooks*, Coleridge makes several passing references to female education, but these are limited to suggestions about how wives should best maintain domestic harmony, and seem to be reflections on his unhappiness with his own unsuccessful marriage rather than developed educational theories.³⁹⁸

Coleridge returned to the subject of education in a lecture he gave in London in 1818 as part of a series on ‘The Principles of Judgement, Culture, and European Literature’. Placing love at the centre of education, Coleridge also emphasized the vital importance of developing children’s memory and imagination, and defended the use of imaginative fiction in teaching:

In the education of children, love is first to be instilled, and out of love obedience is to be educed. Then impulse and power should be given to the intellect, and the ends of a moral being be exhibited. For this object thus much is effected by works of imagination; - that they carry the mind out of self, and show the possible of the good and the great in the human character. [...] We should address ourselves to those faculties in a child’s mind, which are first awakened by nature, and consequently first admit of cultivation, that is to say, the memory and the imagination.³⁹⁹

Coleridge cautioned against forcibly exciting judgement in children, ‘as is too often done in the [unspecified] modern systems of education, which can only lead to selfish views, debtor and creditor principles of virtue, and an inflated sense of

³⁹⁸ See for example *Notebooks* III, Note 3316: ‘Of the one main mighty Defect of Female Education – every thing is taught but Reason & the Means of retaining Affection.’

³⁹⁹ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, II, 192.

merit.⁴⁰⁰ Returning to the theme of man's nature as a 'progressive being', Coleridge emphasized the need to strengthen children's imagination: 'it ought to be carefully guided and strengthened as the indispensable means and instrument of continued amelioration and refinement.'⁴⁰¹ Drawing upon his Romantic roots, he added that the memory of children 'cannot, in reason, be too much stored with the objects and facts of natural history. [...] God teaches [Man] all that is grand and beautiful in the foaming cataract, the glassy lake, and the floating mist.'⁴⁰² Despite his advocacy of imaginative fiction, Coleridge cautioned against allowing children to read 'common modern novels' as: 'Novel-reading of this sort is especially injurious to the growth of the imagination, the judgment, and the morals, especially to the latter, because it excites mere feelings without at the same time ministering an impulse to action.'⁴⁰³ Expanding on this, Coleridge says that such novels 'afford excitement without producing reaction. By reaction, I mean an activity of the intellectual faculties, which shows itself in consequent reasoning and observation, and originates action and conduct according to a principle.'⁴⁰⁴ Interestingly, despite his objections to Maria Edgeworth's approach to education, and her advocacy of 'improving' books, Coleridge's criticisms closely echo Edgeworth's objections to romantic stories in *Practical Education*: 'This species of reading cultivates what is called the heart

⁴⁰⁰ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, II, 193.

⁴⁰¹ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, II, 193.

⁴⁰² Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, II, 193.

⁴⁰³ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, II, 193.

⁴⁰⁴ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, II, 194.

prematurely, lowers the tone of the mind, and induces indifference for [...] common pleasures and occupations.’⁴⁰⁵

Coleridge’s articles on education in *The Friend* and *The Courier*

Whatever concerns he may have had about possible adverse consequences of educating the lower classes, Coleridge remained firmly in favour of national education, as is reflected in many of his published articles. Writing in *The Friend* in January 1810, he quotes approvingly the views of his late employer Sir Alexander Ball on mass education. According to Ball: ‘The dangers, apprehended from the education of the lower classes, arose [...] entirely from its not being universal, and from the unusualness in the lowest classes of *those* accomplishments which he regarded as one of the *means* of education, and not as education itself.’⁴⁰⁶ Ball, according to Coleridge, went on to comment that if only relatively few of the lower classes were educated, such people would ‘naturally become vain and restless, and consider themselves entitled to a higher situation.’ The solution therefore was not to limit education but to educate all of ‘the lowest classes’. Ball compared contemporary fears about mass education with the objections previously raised to educating women, ‘namely that their knowledge made them vain, affected, and

⁴⁰⁵ Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, pp. 191-92.

⁴⁰⁶ Coleridge, ‘Sketches of the Life of Sir Alexander Ball’, *Collected Works* IV, *The Friend* I, 532-546 (pp. 540-41). Sir Alexander Ball was de facto Governor of Malta from 1803 until his death in 1809. Coleridge briefly worked as his secretary. See *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ‘Ball, Sir Alexander (1756–1809)’, by Henry Frendo. <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/1210>> [Accessed 12 March 2017]. As discussed in Chapter five, De Quincey, writing after Coleridge’s death, expressed doubts that Ball would have made such remarks, and suggested that Coleridge was simply ‘ventriloquising’ his own ideas.

neglectful of their proper duties. Now that all women of condition are well educated, we hear no more of these apprehensions.’⁴⁰⁷

Drawing on Ball’s comments in another article in *The Friend* published in January 1810, Coleridge sets out more precisely what he sees as the merits of Bell’s methods in teaching the lower classes in particular, reassuring his readers that this approach will strengthen rather than weaken existing social structures: ‘The dangers apprehended from the education of the lower classes, arose [...] from the unusuality in the lowest classes of those accomplishments [i.e. literacy] which He, like Dr Bell, regarded as one of the *means* of education, and not Education itself.’⁴⁰⁸ Expanding on this in a footnote, he adds: ‘Which consists in *educing*, or, to adopt Dr Bell’s own expression, *eliciting* the faculties of the Human mind, and at the same time subordinating them to the Reason and Conscience; varying the means [...] according to the sphere and particular mode, in which the individual is likely to act & become useful.’⁴⁰⁹

This theme of mass education helping to maintain rather than threatening the existing social hierarchy is developed further in Coleridge’s 15 July 1811 *Courier* article ‘Christ’s Hospital’. Responding to Robert Waithman’s allegations of abuses in CH’s admissions policy, and criticizing claims that CH should educate only the poorest children, Coleridge states that, firstly, this had not been the aim of the founders of the school, and, secondly, that education should not remove children from their ‘proper’ sphere. Admitting the poorest children into CH would ‘call off

⁴⁰⁷ Coleridge, ‘Sketches of the Life of Sir Alexander Ball’, p. 541.

⁴⁰⁸ Coleridge, ‘The Friend, No. 21, January 25 1810’, *Collected Works* IV, II, 288.

⁴⁰⁹ Coleridge, ‘The Friend, No. 21, January 25 1810’, p. 288.

hundreds yearly from the plough and the dray, to lift them into a class [...] where, in 19 cases out of 20, they would be worse than useless.’⁴¹⁰ The aim of the school was to ‘preserve, and not to disturb or destroy, the gradations of society; to catch the falling, not to lift up the standing, from their natural and native rank’.⁴¹¹

In another *Courier* piece, published on 2 November 1814, Coleridge returned to the theme of the spread of education to the lower classes, repeating his earlier argument that ‘whatever inconvenience may have arisen from the commonness of education, can only be removed by rendering it universal.’⁴¹² He goes on to define what he means by the word ‘education’:

[T]hat alone is worthy the name, which does indeed educe the faculties and form the habits [...]. At no time and in no rank of life can knowledge be made our prime object, without injury to the understanding, and certain perversion of those moral institutions, the cultivation of which it must be instrumental and subservient.⁴¹³

Coleridge then criticizes ‘certain modern improvements in the modes of teaching, in comparison with which we have been taught to despise our great public schools’ (a footnote makes it clear that he is referring to the Lancasterian schools). The products of such methods ‘are taught to dispute and decide, to suspect all but their

⁴¹⁰ Coleridge, ‘Christ’s Hospital’, pp. 225-26.

⁴¹¹ Coleridge, ‘Christ’s Hospital’, pp. 225-26. Richardson seems to accept uncritically Leigh Hunt’s claim that ‘hundreds of unfortunate objects have applied in vain for admission [to CH]’, overlooking the fact that the school was always over-subscribed, and that it was therefore inevitable that some would apply in vain. (Richardson, p. 81).

⁴¹² Coleridge, ‘To Mr. Justice Fletcher’, *Collected Works* III, *The Friend* II, 373-417 (p. 395).

⁴¹³ Coleridge, ‘To Mr. Justice Fletcher’, p. 395.

own and their lecturers' wisdom, and to hold nothing sacred from contempt, but their own contemptible arrogance, boy-graduates in all the technical, and all the dirty passions and impudence of anonymous criticism.'⁴¹⁴ Such educational systems are: '[A] species of Jacobinism, proceeding from the same source, and tending to the same end, the rage of innovation, and the scorn and hatred of all ancient establishments.'⁴¹⁵ Coleridge goes on to emphasise that, despite his misgivings about such systems, he remains 'An earnest advocate of national education.'⁴¹⁶

Another *Courier* article, dated 9 December 1815, makes it clear that Coleridge's opposition to Lancaster's system was by this time mainly on the grounds of religion (the 'degrading' punishments having been abolished): 'Free-thinking is to be taught at Lancastrian Schools [...]. They give the Bible, but no Prayer Book. – They recommend no particular religion, thereby hoping to entrap members of the Church of England into an abandonment of their duty, and to put Methodism as forward as the Established Church.'⁴¹⁷ Methodism was seen as a particular danger for both the Church of England and the Establishment in general in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, firstly because it drew working-class people away from the

⁴¹⁴ Coleridge, 'To Mr. Justice Fletcher', pp. 395-96.

⁴¹⁵ Coleridge, 'To Mr. Justice Fletcher', p. 396. Reading this tirade against 'prodigies', reproduced almost verbatim in *Biographia Literaria*, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Coleridge is, perhaps unconsciously, looking back ruefully at his youthful self, led astray by unsupervised reading into Deism and radicalism, even though his own education was at 'one of our great public schools', in his time still untouched by 'modern improvements'. A more obvious target of his attack would perhaps be Hazlitt, although, as explained in Chapter four, Hazlitt himself was sceptical about 'new-fangled experiments or modern seminaries'.

⁴¹⁶ Coleridge, 'To Mr Justice Fletcher', p. 397.

⁴¹⁷ Coleridge, 'Free-Thinkers', *Collected Works* III, II, 421-423 (p. 423). In *The Statesman's Manual* Coleridge conceded that the 'shameful' punishments at Lancaster's schools had been discontinued. (Coleridge, *Collected Works* VI, 40n).

Established Church, and secondly because, by doing away with a clerical hierarchy, it enabled its members to by-pass existing social structures. Hannah More's schools were, for example, seen by some conservative critics in the Church of England as promoting Methodism, even though More was always careful to ensure that the local vicar was consulted before establishing a school.⁴¹⁸

In his 'Essays on the Principles of Method', printed in *The Friend* in 1818, Coleridge gives perhaps his clearest statement of his ideas about the development of a child's mind, and this goes some way to explaining the apparent contradictions in some of his ideas. According to Coleridge:

There is a period in which the method of nature is working for [children]; a period of aimless activity and unregulated accumulation, during which it is enough if we can preserve them in health and *out of harm's way*. Again, there is a period of orderliness, of circumspection, of discipline, in which we purify, separate, define, select, arrange, and settle the nomenclature of communication.⁴¹⁹

These first two phases are followed by a period of 'dawning and twilight, a period of anticipation, affording trials of strength'. Taken together, they will, in the mind of a 'rightly-educated individual' precede the attainment of a Scientific Method. However, unless such an attainment is 'felt and acknowledged, [...] looked forward to and from the very beginning prepared for, there is little hope and small chance that any

⁴¹⁸ More's school at Blagdon proved particularly controversial in this respect. A teacher, suspected of being a Methodist, was appointed to run the school, leading to a bitter dispute between More and the local Anglican clergyman. After a long-running dispute, the school was closed, although it was generally accepted that More had been vindicated. See Stott, pp. 232-57.

⁴¹⁹ Coleridge, 'Essays on the Principles of Method', *Collected Works* IV, I, 496-524 (p. 499).

education will be conducted aright, or [...] prove worth the name.'⁴²⁰ Coleridge is here perhaps consciously distancing himself from the sort of 'hothouse' educational methods proposed by some Utilitarian reformers, and emphasizing the need for 'fallow' periods during which nature can be left to do its work. This represents something approaching a reversion to his earlier Pantisocratic ideas regarding the upbringing of children. Coleridge goes on to attack the 'sophists', who sought to 'shape, to dye, to paint over and to mechanize the mind.' The result of such teaching was: 'young men the most anxiously and expensively be-schoolmastered, be-tutored, be-lectured, anything but *educated*; [...] perilously over-civilized, and most pitiaibly uncultivated!' In Coleridge's view 'all true and living knowledge [must] proceed from within; [...] it may be trained, supported, fed, excited, but can never be infused or impressed.'⁴²¹ Coleridge's target here is clearly the Utilitarian school of educational reformers, such as Jeremy Bentham and Lord Brougham, whose ideas on education were also anathema to Hazlitt, as discussed in Chapter four.

Education in *The Statesman's Manual*, *A Lay Sermon* and *On the Constitution of Church and State*

Coleridge elaborated his views on a system of national education in *The Statesman's Manual* (1816), and here he began to identify the limitations of Bell's approach. Reiterating his view that '[T]he inconveniences that have arisen from [literacy] having become too general, are best removed by making it universal', he qualifies this by adding that a national education will not be achieved simply by teaching 'the people at large' to read and write. Having condemned the non-

⁴²⁰ Coleridge, 'Essays on the Principles of Method', pp. 499-500.

⁴²¹ Coleridge, 'Essay on the Principles of Method', p. 500.

denominational religious teaching at Lancaster's schools as 'pernicious beyond all power of compensation by the new acquirement of reading and writing', he continues:

But take even Dr Bell's original [...] plan, which I myself regard as an especial gift of Providence to the *human race*, and suppose this incomparable machine, this vast moral steam-engine to have been adopted [...] throughout the Empire; it would yet appear to me a most dangerous delusion to rely on this as if this of itself formed an efficient national education.⁴²²

Coleridge's view was that, unless the spread of universal education was accompanied by 'the recurrence to a more manly discipline of intellect on the part of the learned themselves', it was in danger of becoming 'confluent with the evils, it was intended to preclude.'⁴²³ What was needed as a prerequisite for 'an efficient education of the labouring classes', was, therefore, 'a thorough re-casting of the moulds, in which the minds of our Gentry, the characters of our future Land-owners, Magistrates and Senators, are to receive their shape and fashion.'⁴²⁴ In this respect, Coleridge was adopting the 'Evangelical' approach of conservative reformers such as Hannah More, who saw the lax morals of the upper classes as a barrier to reforming the morals and behaviour of the lower classes.

⁴²² Coleridge, 'The Statesman's Manual' *Collected Works* VI, *Lay Sermons*, pp. 41-42. The phrase 'moral steam-engine' is interesting. As well as echoing Wordsworth's reference in the notes to *The Excursion* to Bell's system as a 'simple engine', it perhaps suggests that Coleridge was beginning to perceive that the mechanical nature of Bell's system was not without its drawbacks. Significantly, Coleridge later used the metaphor of a steam engine when expressing his concern about what he regarded as a headlong rush to electoral reform.

⁴²³ Coleridge, 'The Statesman's Manual', p. 42.

⁴²⁴ Coleridge, 'The Statesman's Manual', p. 42.

In a footnote to *A Lay Sermon* (1817), Coleridge suggests that the process of reform of the upper classes was in fact already underway, because the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars had: 'forced on the higher and middle classes [...] the home truth, that national honesty and individual safety, private morals and public security, mutually grounded each other, that they were twined at the very root.'⁴²⁵ As a result, the 'present condition of manners and intellect among the young men at Oxford and Cambridge, the manly sobriety of demeanor [sic], the submission to the routine of study in almost all, and the zeal in pursuit of knowledge and academic distinction' contrasted favourably with the state of the 'two Universities forty, or even thirty years ago.'⁴²⁶ Moreover, there was a 'predominant anxiety concerning the education and principles of their children in all the respectable classes of the community', as evidenced by 'the unexampled sale [...] of the very numerous large and small volumes composed or compiled for the use of parents.'⁴²⁷ Coleridge avoids commenting on the usefulness or otherwise of such volumes, but the evidence from his *Notebooks* is that he remained sceptical.

Despite sharing some of Wordsworth's fears about the subversive outcomes of mass education, Coleridge, unlike Wordsworth, did give serious thought to the possibility, and indeed the desirability, of social mobility through education. In his marginal comments on Steffens' *Caricatures des Heiligsten* (1819-21), where Steffens suggests that movements towards equality would 'destroy true freedom',

⁴²⁵ Coleridge, 'A Lay Sermon', *Collected Works* VI, *Lay Sermons*, p. 164n.

⁴²⁶ Coleridge, 'A Lay Sermon', pp. 164-65nn. There is a bitter irony in Coleridge's reference to university students' increasing 'sobriety' and 'zeal', as his elder son Hartley was later to be deprived of his Fellowship because of 'idleness' and 'intemperance'.

⁴²⁷ Coleridge, 'A Lay Sermon', p. 165n.

Coleridge writes: 'A Peasant does not wish to become a Lord – no, nor perhaps does he wish to be a Parson or a Doctor, but he would have the Soul of a Slave if he did not desire that there should be the *possibility* of his Children or Grand-children becoming such.'⁴²⁸ Coleridge explored the theme of social mobility through education in *On the Constitution of Church and State* (1829). Writing of the basic duties of the State, Coleridge suggests that one of these was 'to secure to the subjects of the realm generally, the hope, the chance, of bettering their own or their children's condition.'⁴²⁹ This would not only benefit the state, by 'drawing up whatever is worthiest from below', but also maintain 'the principle of Hope in the humblest families.'⁴³⁰ The other main duty of the State should be 'to develop [sic], in every native of the country, those faculties, and to provide for every native that knowledge and those attainments, which are necessary to qualify him for a member of the state, the free subject of a civilized realm.'⁴³¹ Thus Coleridge not only insisted unequivocally upon the education of its citizens as a primary duty of the State, but also saw the possibility of social mobility through education as desirable both for individuals and for the State.

The education of Coleridge's children

In 'Frost at Midnight' (1798), Coleridge had promised his infant son Hartley that he would have a different education from his own:

And think that thou shalt learn far other lore,

⁴²⁸ Coleridge, *Collected Works* XII, *Marginalia* V, 74.

⁴²⁹ Coleridge, *Collected Works* X, *On the Constitution of Church and State*, ed. by John Colmer (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 73.

⁴³⁰ Coleridge, *On the Constitution of Church and State*, p. 74.

⁴³¹ Coleridge, *On the Constitution of Church and State*, p. 74.

And in far other scenes! For I was reared
In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim,
And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars.
But *thou*, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze
By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags
Of ancient mountain⁴³²

In a letter to Charles Lloyd Senior on October 1796, Coleridge stated that: 'I am anxious that my children should be bred up from earliest infancy in the simplicity of peasants, their food, dress and habits completely rustic.'⁴³³ At first his children were educated at home, but when Coleridge's marriage to Sara finally broke down in 1808, it was decided to send the children away to school in the north of England, where Southey would supervise their education, in theory at least with Coleridge's assistance. Coleridge had long idealized Wordsworth's education at the Hawkshead Grammar School, and on this basis both Hartley and Derwent were sent to study as day boys at a small grammar school at Ambleside, being boarded with a local family, as Wordsworth had been. As was usual for middle-class girls at the time, Coleridge's daughter Sara was educated at home. Coleridge had made a start in educating Sara, teaching her the rudiments of Latin and Italian. Southey took over Sara's education, and taught her with his own daughter, Edith, as well as monitoring Hartley's and

⁴³² Coleridge, 'Frost at Midnight', lines 50-56, *Collected Works* XVI, *Poetical Works*, ed. by J. C. C. Mays (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2001), I, 455-56.

⁴³³ Coleridge, *Letters* I, 240.

Derwent's progress at school. Coleridge visited his children only rarely, and Southey frequently expressed his frustration at Coleridge's lack of interest in them.⁴³⁴

The results of the Coleridge boys' education were mixed. Hartley, a solitary child with few friends, did well at school, and secured a place at Merton College, Oxford. He subsequently gained a fellowship at Oriel College but was deemed to have forfeited it because of 'idleness' and 'intemperance' and was an alcoholic for the rest of his life. He worked briefly as a teacher in Ambleside (Wordsworth's son Willy being one of his pupils) before 'retiring' in his late thirties. He seems to have inherited more than his fair share of Coleridge's indolence and tendency to procrastinate. Derwent attended St John's College, Cambridge, and, in contrast to Hartley, had a long and distinguished career as a teacher and cleric. He frequently wrote and lectured on the subject of education, and was appointed Principal of St Mark's College, Chelsea, the first college established specifically to train elementary schoolmasters. He was also an advocate of the development of Working Men's Colleges.⁴³⁵

The impact of Coleridge's ideas

The greatest impact of Coleridge's ideas on education came indirectly, from his influence on Southey and Wordsworth, and, after his death, on educational

⁴³⁴ For example, Southey wrote to Coleridge's brother George in 1814: 'He never writes to them; & it is in vain to importune him with letters when by chance we learn the place of his abode; for it has very long been his custom never to open any letter which he thinks may by possibility contain any thing that he does not wish to hear, or relate to any thing of which he does not chuse [sic] to be reminded.' *Letters of Robert Southey*, ed. by Ian Packer and Lynda Pratt <https://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/southey_letters/Part_Four/HTML/letterEEEd.26.2485.html> [Accessed 24 May 2018].

⁴³⁵ See 'Coleridge, Derwent (1800–1883)' by Cherry Durrant in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/5879>> [Accessed 2 April 2017].

reformers such as John Stuart Mill, as explored in Chapter six. Southey, like Coleridge, had moved away from deism and radicalism to political and religious conservatism. Although he had written articles for the *Annual Review* in 1806 and 1807 praising Lancaster for establishing schools which could quickly spread literacy and numeracy, once Southey examined Lancaster's methods in detail, he came to the same unfavourable conclusion as Coleridge, especially about its system of rewards and punishments.⁴³⁶

Southey and Wordsworth subsequently met Bell via Coleridge; both were impressed by Bell's personality and theories, and in turn introduced Bell's ideas to a wider audience; Southey through his 1811 book on Bell's methods, *Origin, Nature, and Object of the New System of Education*, originally published anonymously, and Wordsworth via a footnote to Book IX of *The Excursion* (1814): 'The discovery of Dr. Bell affords marvellous facilities for carrying this [general basic education] into effect, and it is impossible to overrate the benefit which might accrue to humanity from the universal application of this simple engine under an enlightened and conscientious government.'⁴³⁷ As a measure of the success of such publicity, by the time of Coleridge's 1818 lecture, Bell's methods had been adopted by over 500 public and private schools, including Charterhouse, as mentioned above, whilst CH itself brought in Bell's methods at its junior School at Hertford as early as 1810.⁴³⁸ Bell's assistant, Mr Davis, reported enthusiastically on its introduction: 'An intelligent, well-disposed, unobtrusive master, able, active, diligent, correct, cheerful

⁴³⁶ Craig, p. 97.

⁴³⁷ Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, Book IX, p. 314.

⁴³⁸ Charles Cuthbert Southey, *Life of Bell*, Vol II, pp. 302-3.

teachers, happy boys [...] – the hum of industry, marked books, registers etc., beautifully kept.’⁴³⁹ It is interesting to compare his comments with the jaundiced view of a CH pupil some ten years later: ‘The system pursued here is Bell’s, consisting of as many manoeuvres as a regiment of soldiers going through a morning’s drill.’⁴⁴⁰ Despite Coleridge’s affiliation with CH and friendship with Bell, there is no evidence that he played any part in introducing Bell’s system there.

Conclusion

In his educational theories, as in many other areas, Coleridge was trying to reconcile two apparently contradictory concepts; an affordable system of mass education that was, at the same time, tailored to the needs of each individual child, and which would also allow scope for the development of his or her imagination and personality. Looking at Coleridge’s own thoughts on education, as described in his lectures and articles, as well as in ‘unofficial’ sources such as his *Notebooks* and *Marginalia*, it is difficult to understand quite why he was so strongly attracted to Bell’s system. Many of Coleridge’s ideas can be seen as extreme reactions to what he saw as his earlier follies, in particular his political radicalism and his brief alienation from the Church of England, and this reaction comes through clearly in his unquestioning support for Bell and his opposition not only to Lancaster, whose ideas he saw as leading inexorably to radicalism and deism, but to any state funding for non-conformist, or non-denominational education.⁴⁴¹ It is also clear from Bell’s

⁴³⁹ Charles Cuthbert Southey, *Life of Bell*, Vol II, p. 303.

⁴⁴⁰ George Wickham, quoted in *The Christ’s Hospital Book*, ed. by Edmund Blunden, Eric Bennett, Philip Youngman Carter, and J. E. Morpurgo (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953), p. 93.

⁴⁴¹ See, for example, Coleridge’s Swiftian ‘A Modest Proposal for Abolishing the Church of England’ where, in the guise of ‘A Lover of “Universal Toleration”’, he

influence on both Wordsworth and Southey that he was a charismatic individual (although as discussed in Chapter two, Wordsworth relatively quickly became disillusioned with him) and Coleridge may have also fallen under Bell's influence to the extent that he overlooked the flaws in his system.

Several consistent themes emerge from Coleridge's lectures and articles on education. His fundamental belief was that education must build on and develop what is within the child, in direct contradiction to the Utilitarian 'hothouse' approach of immersing a child in knowledge, as far as possible in isolation from the outside world. Secondly, he insisted that children should not be made to moralize before they were able to understand. Finally, education should, as far as possible, be tailored to the ability and understanding of each child. Despite their shared admiration for Bell's Madras system, Coleridge's views on education differed in several key respects from Wordsworth's. Perhaps most significantly, Coleridge insisted that education must always have a purpose, and that this purpose should be to equip an individual for an occupation. Wordsworth by contrast said that from his youth he had valued knowledge solely 'for its own sake' (see Chapter two).

Commenting in his *Marginalia* on Heinrich Steffens' suggestion in *Über die Idee der Universtaten* (1809) that young people of genius should not fear for the future, and that 'poverty, external pressure, slander of silly fools must *not* disturb you in the least', Coleridge, who saw his own failings in worldly terms as due largely to the lack of a settled profession, writes:

What *wild*, DELIRIOUS advice! [...] The more powerful & evident your genius [...], the more incumbent it is on you to fix on a Profession as a means of

predicts that non-denominational teaching will lead inexorably to 'the abolition of the *Established Church*', *Collected Works* III, II, 341-6 (p. 342).

Honourable Livelihood, but let not this be your ultimate Object, and either choose an occupation, that will, with vigor & industry on your part allow you a portion of time for the Studies & Labors of your free choice – or else choose a profession in which you may make it a worthy ultimate end to *raise* the profession, and not merely to rise in it.⁴⁴²

Steffens' view is remarkably close to that of Wordsworth in his 'Reply to Mathetes' (see Chapter two) where Wordsworth suggests that the 'advice and exhortation' of 'Parents, Kindred and Friends [...] have diverted or discouraged the Youth who [...] had determined to follow his intellectual genius through good and through evil.'⁴⁴³ As discussed in Chapter five, De Quincey took issue with Coleridge's objections to literature as a profession.

Another point of difference between Wordsworth and Coleridge was that Coleridge, despite his warnings against over-reading in childhood, always had a deep respect for what Wordsworth sometimes dismissed as 'book-learning'. Coleridge was particularly sceptical about Wordsworth's claims for the superiority of the untutored rustic mind: 'It is not every man that is likely to be improved by a country life or by country labour. Education, or original sensibility, or both, must pre-exist, if the changes, forms, and incidents of nature are to prove a sufficient stimulant.' Without these, Coleridge held, 'the ancient mountains, with all their terrors and all their glories, are pictures to the blind, and music to the deaf.'⁴⁴⁴ Coleridge, whilst

⁴⁴² Coleridge, *Collected Works* XII, *Marginalia* V, 367.

⁴⁴³ Wordsworth, 'Reply to Mathetes', p. 231. Wordsworth may, of course, have changed his views on this following his younger son Willy's failure to settle on a career. (See Chapter two.)

⁴⁴⁴ Coleridge *Collected Works* VII, *Biographia Literaria* II, ed. by Walter Jackson Bate and James Engell (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), pp. 44-45.

recognising the importance of an early, unmediated reaction to poetry and landscape, always held that their fullest appreciation could only be achieved through education.

In spite of his move from radicalism to conservatism, and his eventual disillusion with Bell's monitorial approach, Coleridge consistently asserted that some form of national education was both necessary and desirable, pointing out that the actual evils arising from ignorance were far worse than any potential evils which might be caused by universal education. The fundamental drawback with Coleridge's approach to educational reform, however, was that it was based on the presumption that the Church of England should control any national system of education, and that it would therefore be wrong in principle for the state to fund any form of dissenting or non-denominational teaching. Ironically, given Coleridge's consistent view that the only way to ensure a positive outcome from the education of the lower classes was to make it 'universal', such sectarian issues delayed this outcome for several decades. Any plans to introduce universal compulsory elementary education during the first half of the nineteenth century were frustrated by one or other party; Church of England supporters vetoed public funding of nonconformist schools, whilst nonconformists refused to support any measure that would allow funding only for Church of England schools.⁴⁴⁵ Such was the bitterness of the debate, and so entrenched were the various parties, that the measure was delayed until Forster's Elementary Education Act of 1870, some thirty-five years after Coleridge's death.

⁴⁴⁵ The continuing sectarian divisions on this issue are vividly reflected in the separate establishments of the non-denominational University of London in 1826 and the Anglican King's College London in 1831.

Chapter Four: Hazlitt

This chapter considers Hazlitt's education, in particular his abruptly terminated attendance at Hackney New College, a leading Dissenting Academy. It focuses on Hazlitt's distrust of State-provided mass education, and on his alternating advocacy of, and opposition to, Classical education. The chapter also looks at Hazlitt's view, derived from Rousseau, that any sort of academic education was wasted on women. It concludes with a discussion of the education of Hazlitt's only child.

Hazlitt's education

Hazlitt's education was unconventional in several respects. He began as a child prodigy, had a sound early grounding in the Classics, being partly taught by his father, went at the age of fifteen to what was by contemporary standards a progressive academic institution, then dropped out of education completely at the age of seventeen, after which time he was entirely self-taught. His ideas about education, often inconsistent and even confused, need to be considered in the context of his own disrupted schooling.

Hazlitt's father was educated at Glasgow University from 1756 to 1761. His professors at Glasgow encouraged their students to think for themselves and, in Duncan Wu's words, 'That unshakeable belief in liberty of thought and worship had a profound effect on the personality of Hazlitt Sr, and in turn on his son.'⁴⁴⁶ Many of those graduating from Glasgow University at this time became Dissenters (in Hazlitt Sr's case, a Unitarian). This closed the way to progress in the established Church and throughout his life Hazlitt's father put personal principles and beliefs above

⁴⁴⁶ Duncan Wu, *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), hereafter Wu, p. 23.

worldly ambition, living much of his life in relative poverty as a result. Although he always respected his father, Hazlitt later explained to his son what he saw as the chief drawback of a dissenting upbringing:

It was my misfortune perhaps to be bred up among Dissenters, who look with too jaundiced an eye at others, and set too high a value on their own peculiar pretensions. From being proscribed themselves, they learn to proscribe others; and come in the end to reduce all integrity of principle and soundness of opinion within the pale of their own little communion. Those who were out of it and did not belong to the class of *Rational Dissenters*, I was led erroneously to look upon as hardly deserving the name of rational beings.⁴⁴⁷

The family lived in the United States from 1783 to 1787, whilst Hazlitt's father tried to earn a living as a Unitarian preacher. During this time, Hazlitt (aged seven) having learned to read from Mrs Barbauld's story books, along with contemporary childhood favourites such as *Jack the Giant-Killer*, was reported by his sister Margaret to have almost killed himself with 'excessive application to Latin grammar.'⁴⁴⁸

On the family's return to England in 1787, Hazlitt, then aged nine, went to a small school near their home in Wem, Shropshire, his school lessons being

⁴⁴⁷ William Hazlitt, *Letters*, edited by Herschel Moreland Sikes (hereafter *Letters*) (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 218-219.

⁴⁴⁸ Catherine Macdonald Maclean, *Born Under Saturn: a biography of William Hazlitt* (London: Collins, 1943), p. 21. As a schoolboy, Hazlitt greatly admired Mrs Barbauld's poetry, with which he became acquainted via the anthology *The Speaker*, edited by William Enfield. In his lecture on the English poets, however, Hazlitt damned Barbauld with faint praise, referring to her as 'a very pretty poetess' who 'strews the flowers of poetry most agreeably round the borders of religious controversy.' Hazlitt, *Selected Writings II, The Round Table; Lectures on the English Poets*, ed. by Duncan Wu, (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), Lecture VIII 'On the Living Poets', 298-320 (p. 301).

complemented with additional tuition by his father.⁴⁴⁹ At the age of ten, he recorded his studies in a letter to his brother John, then living in London:

Next Monday I shall begin to read Ovid Metamorphosis [sic] and Eutropius. I shall like to know all the Latin and Greek I can. I want to learn to measure the stars. [...] I began to cypher a fortnight after Christmas and shall go into the rule of three next week [...] I shall be through the whole cyphering book this summer, and then I am to learn Euclid.⁴⁵⁰

In the words of Hazlitt's son, Hazlitt's father enjoyed teaching William; it was a task which 'the docility and vivid comprehension of the pupil rendered not merely easy, but delightful.'⁴⁵¹ A family acquaintance had said, on reading one of Hazlitt's letters: 'He has uncommon powers of mind, and if nothing happens to prevent him receiving a liberal education, he must make a great man.'⁴⁵² Hazlitt studied hard, reading at mealtimes. As with Coleridge, his precocious intellectual ability led him to despise most of his fellow pupils and this, in turn, alienated them from him. In Hazlitt's words: 'Some are so sulky they won't play. Others are quarrelsome because they cannot learn and are fit only for fighting like stupid dogs and cats.'⁴⁵³ Unlike Coleridge, however, Hazlitt took an active interest in sports, recording in a letter to

⁴⁴⁹ Stephen Burley, in *Hazlitt the Dissenter: Religion, Philosophy, and Politics, 1766-1816* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), states that Hazlitt's father took over the school at Wem from his predecessor, John Houghton, 'a strict disciplinarian' (p. 40).

⁴⁵⁰ Hazlitt, *Letters*, p. 45.

⁴⁵¹ William Hazlitt, *Literary Remains of the Late William Hazlitt, with a Notice of his Life* (New York: Saunders and Otley, 1836), p. ii.

⁴⁵² Maclean, p. 585.

⁴⁵³ Hazlitt, *Letters*, p. 46.

his brother John that 'I can jump four yards at a running jump and two at a standing jump.'⁴⁵⁴

At the age of eleven Hazlitt suffered from what was described as 'nervous prostration' brought on by overwork. In his sister's words: 'William set himself to work in earnest and intense application as had nearly cost him his life.'⁴⁵⁵ A second breakdown occurred in 1793 when Hazlitt was fifteen. Hazlitt later warned his own son about this danger:

You are, I think, too fond of reading as it is. As one means of avoiding excess in this way, I would wish you to make it a rule, never to read at meal-times [...] nor ever to let your eagerness to learn encroach upon your play-hours. Books are but one inlet of knowledge; and the pores of the mind, like those of the body, should be left open to all impressions. I applied too close to my studies, soon after I was of your age, and hurt myself irreparably by it.

Whatever may be the value of learning, health and good spirits are of more.⁴⁵⁶ In his own words, Hazlitt's natural posture at this time was that of the scholar, which he later defined in his essay 'The Shyness of Scholars' (1819) as being 'slow, cautious, circuitous, instead of being prompt, heedless, straightforward', someone who was happier dealing with 'historic personages and abstract propositions' than

⁴⁵⁴ Hazlitt, *Letters*, p. 46.

⁴⁵⁵ *The Journals of Margaret Hazlitt*, ed. by Ernest J. Moyne (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1967), p. 89, cited in Wu, p. 44.

⁴⁵⁶ Hazlitt, *Letters*, p. 222.

with 'men and things.'⁴⁵⁷ It is possible to see some of Hazlitt's later outspokenness and 'plain speaking', and his scepticism about scholarship, as a reaction against this.

From the age of fifteen to seventeen, Hazlitt attended Hackney New College, with the intention of following his father in becoming a Unitarian minister. The College, which opened in 1786, following the closure of the nearby Hoxton Academy, occupied a 'large and noble' building in an eighteen-acre plot enclosed by a brick wall, its grounds containing walks, an extensive garden, offices and teaching rooms.⁴⁵⁸ There were no religious qualifications for entry; Anglicans, Roman Catholics and Dissenters studied alongside each other, and the school's ethos was founded on religious toleration. The full curriculum at Hackney covered five years (essentially sixth-form and undergraduate years), with an increasing focus on theological studies in the final two years for those destined for the Unitarian ministry. The fees were £60 a year, which, as Stanley Jones points out, was twice Hazlitt's father's annual income.⁴⁵⁹ Hazlitt was awarded an exhibition of £12 a year from the Presbyterian Fund, and it is possible that the fees were subsidised to some extent because of family connections. Hazlitt's father was a close friend of Joseph Priestley and Andrew Kippis, both founding tutors of the College.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁷ Hazlitt, 'The Shyness of Scholars', *Complete Works* XVII, *Uncollected Essays*, ed. by P. P. Howe (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1933), 254-64 (p. 255).

⁴⁵⁸ Stephen Burley (ed.), *New College, Hackney (1786-96): A Selection of Printed and Archival Sources*: <<http://www.qmulreligionandliterature.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/DWL-Online-Publication.pdf>> [Accessed 2 May 2017](hereafter Burley).

⁴⁵⁹ Stanley Jones, *Hazlitt: a life; from Winterslow to Frith Street* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 346.

⁴⁶⁰ Wu, p. 56; Maclean, p. 62.

In political terms, Hackney was radical and anti-establishment from the outset. Its early tutors included Richard Price, whose *Discourse on the Love of our Country* (1789) led to Edmund Burke's lengthy riposte *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), and Joseph Priestley, whose house in Birmingham was burned down by a 'King and Country' mob, inspiring Hazlitt's first published work, a letter to the editor of the *Shrewsbury Chronicle* in 1791 condemning the attack.⁴⁶¹ Edmund Burke described the College in *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791) as 'an arsenal' for the fabrication of revolutionary weapons.⁴⁶² In 1792, as if illustrating Burke's point, the Hackney students gave Tom Paine a revolutionary supper, and made revolutionary speeches.⁴⁶³

Hazlitt undertook a varied curriculum at Hackney, as captured in a series of letters to his father: 'On Monday I attend Dr Rees on mathematics and algebra. [...] At two, I have a lecture in shorthand and one in Hebrew. [...] On Tuesday we have a lecture [...] one week Greek, another Latin [...] and another lecture [...] on Greek antiquities.'⁴⁶⁴ As outlined in Chapter one, Dissenting Academies such as Hackney went beyond the narrow Classical curriculum of most public and grammar schools, teaching science, mathematics, history, modern languages and English literature. Arguably, the best of them provided a better education than most Oxford or Cambridge colleges at this time. Hazlitt was taught inter alia by major figures in the dissenting movement such as Joseph Priestley and Andrew Kippis. Both had taught

⁴⁶¹ Wu, p. 49.

⁴⁶² Edmund Burke, *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, (London: J. Dodsley, 1791), p. 113.

⁴⁶³ Burley, *Hazlitt the Dissenter*, p. 83.

⁴⁶⁴ Hazlitt, *Letters*, p. 61.

extensively at other major Dissenting Academies, such as Warrington and Manchester, and Kippis had taught William Godwin when he attended the Hoxton Academy.⁴⁶⁵

The significance of Hazlitt's education at Hackney went beyond the purely academic. Hackney was influential in its approach to freedom of thought and speech, and in the radicalism of its tutors and students. It emphasised the importance of freedom of conscience amongst its students, which eventually proved self-defeating in terms of the College's viability as a training school for the Unitarian ministry. In the words of Richard Price, the teaching at Hackney was designed to 'promote such a spirit of inquiry and candour, as shall form worthy citizens for the state, and useful ministers for the church.' Students should remember that they were 'members of the larger society of mankind and ought therefore to care for whatever respects general liberty and general happiness.' For such training, the times were propitious: 'Another and most important circumstance which calls us to attend to the proper education of our youth is the new light which is now [...] bursting out in favour of the civil *rights of men*, and the great objects and uses of *civil government*. While so favourable a wind is abroad, let every young mind expand itself, catch the rising gale, and partake of the glorious enthusiasm [...] Let the liberal youth be everywhere encouraged to study the nature of government.'⁴⁶⁶ There are echoes in Price's words of the idealism of Wordsworth, Southey and Coleridge in the immediate aftermath of

⁴⁶⁵ Herschel Baker, *William Hazlitt*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 25.

⁴⁶⁶ 'The Proper Objects of Education in the Present State of the World', a discourse given by Joseph Priestley on 27 April 1791 to the Guardians of New College, Hackney, cited by Maclean, p. 63.

the French Revolution, before their disillusion following the Reign of Terror and the Napoleonic Wars.

Despite making good progress academically, Hazlitt left the College in June 1795, shortly after his seventeenth birthday, 'an avowed infidel.'⁴⁶⁷ In theory, he could have continued to study at the College for a further year as a lay student, but, probably for financial reasons (he would, for instance, have forfeited his £12 a year exhibition) he chose to remain at home and complete his education there. In any event, the College did not survive long after Hazlitt left; it closed in 1796, and the school buildings were sold and demolished in 1800. Wu implies that Hazlitt's departure was a major factor in the College's demise, but this seems unlikely.⁴⁶⁸ Dissenting Academies in general, with rare exceptions such as Homerton College, tended to be short-lived, often failing on the death or resignation of individual teachers.⁴⁶⁹ Several reasons were suggested, both at the time and retrospectively, for Hackney New College's failure, including falling income, financial mismanagement,

⁴⁶⁷ The phrase 'an avowed infidel' is Henry Crabb Robinson's; cited in Burley, *Hazlitt the Dissenter*, p. 87.

⁴⁶⁸ Wu states that Hazlitt's departure was 'the beginning of the end for the Hackney College' (p. 62). However, as Burley points out, from a peak of forty-nine students in 1791, there were only around twenty in attendance when Hazlitt began his studies. (Burley, *Hazlitt the Dissenter*, p. 80).

⁴⁶⁹ A letter from Edward Harwood, a Presbyterian minister and biblical scholar, to the *Gentleman's Magazine* woefully records a series of such failures: 'The academy at Kendal, in Westmorland [sic], kept by Dr. Rotheram, a learned and intelligent man, perished at his death. The academy at Taunton, kept by Mr. Grove, and afterwards by Dr. Armory, was discontinued upon his removal to London. The academy at Warrington was completely ruined by building several stately structures, by being not able to raise money adequate to the pomp of them, and having no fund to assist the students. The late academy at Exeter, kept by the ingenious and pious Mr. Towgood and Mr. Merrivale, is now no more. The academy at Daventry, Northamptonshire, is also broken up.' Burley, p. 182.

problems with students' behaviour, and, in particular, the students' tendency to lose their faith.⁴⁷⁰

As early as 1800, Coleridge identified this 'infidelity' as the main weakness of the College in a letter to John Prior Estlin: 'It may be very true, that at Hackney they learnt, too many of them, Infidelity, - the Tutors, the *whole* plan of Education, the place itself, were all wrong.'⁴⁷¹ Southey wrote in 1816: 'It is well known that the Socinian Academy at Hackney was given up, notwithstanding the high character and learning of some of its conductors, because almost all the students pushed the principles in which they were educated farther than their tutors. [...] [T]he unfortunate pupils came away believers in blind necessity and gross materialism – and in nothing else.'⁴⁷² Southey was, of course, partisan, in that he favoured the Church of England having a monopoly on education, and was writing long after the event, but his and Coleridge's comments reflect the concern of contemporary critics of the College such as Gilbert Wakefield, the College's Classical Tutor. Wakefield, who, as explained below, had many reservations about the mode of teaching at Hackney, was also concerned about the interruption of the students' work and the constant 'dissipation of ideas and unsettlement of mind' caused by their interest in current events, such as the trial of Warren Hastings.⁴⁷³

Another factor in the College's demise was a very public disagreement between Gilbert Wakefield and Andrew Kippis, which culminated in both men

⁴⁷⁰ See, for example, Burley, *Hazlitt the Dissenter*, pp. 87-89.

⁴⁷¹ Coleridge, *Letters* I, 577.

⁴⁷² Maclean, pp. 65-66.

⁴⁷³ Maclean, p. 64.

resigning. Wakefield objected to the broad curriculum taught at the College, arguing that it prevented students from obtaining a solid grounding in the Classics. He was particularly critical of the teaching of belles-lettres, which was Kippis' main subject. Wakefield withdrew his resignation, only to resign again a few months later, publishing a series of articles which, in Stephen Burley's phrase 'attacked virtually every aspect of New College life', and which produced equally robust responses from Priestley.⁴⁷⁴ The controversy between Wakefield and Priestley eventually centred around the question of religious tolerance at the College; Wakefield claiming to have 'experienced more proofs of genuine liberality in the members of the *Church of England* in the UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE [...] than in those *dissenters*.'⁴⁷⁵ This continuing dissent amongst Dissenters seems more likely to have been the underlying cause of the College's demise than the loss of a single student, and illustrates the point Hazlitt often made about the habitual narrow-mindedness of sects.⁴⁷⁶

One of Hazlitt's tutors at the College, the Rev Thomas Belshaw, wrote of 'an unaccountable tendency in the young men, in this part of the world, to infidelity, and the studious and virtuous part of our family have very generally given up Christianity.'⁴⁷⁷ Looking at Hazlitt's reading whilst at Hackney, his loss of faith seems hardly surprising. He read 'modern philosophers' such as Helvetius and Holbach,

⁴⁷⁴ Burley, in *Hazlitt the Dissenter*, pp. 77-78, gives a full account of this controversy.

⁴⁷⁵ Burley, *Hazlitt the Dissenter*, p. 78.

⁴⁷⁶ See, for example, Hazlitt's 1817 *Round Table* essay 'On the Tendency of Sects' in *Selected Writings II, The Round Table; Lectures on the English Poets*, ed. by Duncan Wu (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), pp. 48-52.

⁴⁷⁷ John Williams, *Memoirs of the Late Reverend Thomas Belsham*, pp. 461-62, cited in Burley, *Hazlitt the Dissenter*, p. 88.

who 'disturbed him with their view of man as a creature of selfish, mechanistic motivation'. He read 'with particular satisfaction' Thomas Chubb's deistical tracts, and also read Locke (whose *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* he thought 'overrated'), Berkeley, Hartley, Hume, Godwin and Rousseau, the last of whose works he 'devoured tooth and nail.' Tellingly, given his own literary and personal development, Hazlitt, in his Round Table essay 'On the Character of Rousseau' saw Rousseau's chief distinction as being the 'acute and even morbid feeling of all that related to his own impressions, to the objects and events of his life.'⁴⁷⁸

Hazlitt's earliest writing on education related to a proposal for a new national scheme of education, put to the House of Commons by Samuel Whitbread, MP in February 1807. Whitbread, who had been influenced by the writings of Thomas Malthus, was concerned about the danger of over-population, though he regarded Malthus' proposed solution (which included the complete abolition of the Poor Laws) as draconian and impracticable. Whitbread, pointing to the example of Scotland, envisaged the establishment of a system of parochial schools in England and Wales, to provide voluntary education, using the 'monitorial' methods of Joseph Lancaster.⁴⁷⁹ The schools would also provide religious instruction, which would ensure, in Whitbread's words, 'that the interests of the establishment are strictly guarded, whilst at the same time the sacred rights of toleration are in no respect violated.'⁴⁸⁰ Whitbread was against compulsory education, as he believed that this

⁴⁷⁸ Hazlitt, 'On the Character of Rousseau', *Selected Writings* II, 90-94 (p. 90).

⁴⁷⁹ Samuel Whitbread, *Speech on the Poor Laws* (London: J Ridgway, 1807), p. 37. Whitbread added a note (p. 99) to the effect that the invention of the monitorial system was also claimed by Dr Andrew Bell. Richardson states, incorrectly, that Whitbread's proposals were based on 'the Madras system' (Richardson, p. 91).

⁴⁸⁰ Samuel Whitbread, *Speech on the Poor Laws*, p. 38.

would cause antipathy amongst parents (for similar reasons, he was opposed to compulsory vaccination). Alongside the new system of education, working people would be encouraged to save money through a national savings bank, and eventually acquire property, and an elementary system of national insurance would be introduced.⁴⁸¹ All these measures, Whitbread argued, would in due course lift people from poverty and render the Poor Laws unnecessary.

Hazlitt was fundamentally opposed to Malthus, and wrote several essays over many years attacking his ideas.⁴⁸² As Burley points out, Whitbread's proposals were, in Hazlitt's view, tainted by association with Malthus.⁴⁸³ Maclean suggests that the sight of 'Malthus about the House of Commons, with his Essay in his hand, "lobbying" members while the Bill was under discussion' would not be reassuring to those such as Hazlitt whose sympathies lay with the poor.⁴⁸⁴ Hazlitt's specific objections to Whitbread's proposed system of education were twofold. Firstly, Hazlitt suggested that no national system of education could be derived that would meet the very

⁴⁸¹ Samuel Whitbread, *Speech on the Poor Laws*, pp. 45-46.

⁴⁸² For example, Hazlitt included five essays on Malthus, written from 1807 onwards, in *Political Writings* (1819): 'An Examination of Mr. Malthus's Doctrines', 'On the Originality of Mr. Malthus's Essay', 'On the Principles of Population as affecting the Schemes of Utopian Improvement', 'On the Application of Mr. Malthus's Principle to the Poor Laws' and 'Queries relating to the Essay on Population', see *Selected Writings IV, Political Essays*, ed. by Duncan Wu (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998). Hazlitt returned to the subject in 1823 when De Quincey wrote two articles for *The London Magazine* attacking Malthus's ideas in terms very similar to those used in Hazlitt's earlier essays.

⁴⁸³ Burley, *Hazlitt the Dissenter*, p. 158.

⁴⁸⁴ Maclean, p. 225.

different needs of the diverse types of community to be found in England.⁴⁸⁵ He asks: 'Supposing it practicable, will the adoption of a general plan of education have the same effect in our great manufacturing towns, in our sea-ports, in the metropolis, that it has in the heart of Scotland, or in the mountains of Cumberland?'⁴⁸⁶ Secondly, he was doubtful of the wisdom of any form of religious instruction in schools: 'I do not scruple to assert, that religion itself, when it comes in contact with certain situations, may be highly dangerous. It is the soil in which the greatest virtues and the greatest vices take root.'⁴⁸⁷ Surprisingly, Hazlitt suggests in support of this view that religious dissent might lead to lower moral standards: '[T]he morals of the people in the trading towns of the north of England are, I believe, worse than they are farther south, because they are brought up more religiously. The common people there are almost all of them originally dissenters.'⁴⁸⁸ Whatever his reservations about Dissenters, Hazlitt consistently opposed the stranglehold that the Church of England maintained on English education. In an 1819 essay criticising Coleridge's *Statesman's Manual*, he wrote:

We do not understand how [...] it is consistent in Mr Coleridge to declare of 'Dr Bell's original and unsophisticated plan' that he 'himself regards it as an

⁴⁸⁵ Wordsworth had used very similar terms at around the same time to criticize plans for national education; see Chapter two.

⁴⁸⁶ Hazlitt, 'A Reply to Malthus's Essay on Population' (1807), *Complete Works I, An Essay on the Principles of Human Action, Free Thoughts on Public Affairs, A Reply to Malthus &c.*, ed. By P. P. Howe (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd, 1930), 181-363 (p. 184). Hazlitt's *A Reply to the Essay on Population, by the Rev T. R. Malthus. In a Series of Letters* was published anonymously in 1807. The first three letters, including his comments on Whitbread's proposed scheme of education, were published in Cobbett's *Weekly Political Register*.

⁴⁸⁷ Hazlitt, 'A Reply to Malthus's Essay on Population' (1807), *Complete Works I*, 184.

⁴⁸⁸ Hazlitt, 'A Reply to Malthus's Essay on Population' (1807), *Complete Works I*, 184.

especial gift of Providence to the human race, an incomparable machine, a vast moral steam-engine'. Learning is an old University mistress, that he is not willing to part with, except for the use of the church of England, and he is sadly afraid she should be debauched by the 'liberal ideas' of Joseph Lancaster.⁴⁸⁹

Coleridge's objections to Lancaster's 'liberal ideas' centred around what he saw as a plan to 'poison' the children of the poor with a sort of '*potential* infidelity' by teaching them only those points of religious faith on which all denominations agreed. It is not hard to see why Hazlitt, with his Dissenting background, would object to this exclusive approach to teaching; although he saw the Dissenting tradition as leading to narrow-mindedness, he saw the Church of England as both fundamentally corrupt and an agent of State control.

Fundamentally, Hazlitt, in common with Wordsworth at this point, was sceptical about both the practicality and the benefits of mass education: '[W]ill the poor people in the trading towns send their children to school instead of sending them to work at a factory? Or will their employers, forgetting their own interests, compel them to do it?'⁴⁹⁰ Events supported Hazlitt's scepticism on this point; a large proportion of children in industrial cities in the North, such as Leeds, went uneducated until some form of education became compulsory (Whitbread's proposal would have provided free, but voluntary elementary education).⁴⁹¹ If impracticable

⁴⁸⁹ Hazlitt, 'Mr Coleridge's Statesman's Manual', *Selected Writings* IV, 112-120 (p. 118).

⁴⁹⁰ Hazlitt, 'A Reply to Malthus's Essay on Population', *Complete Works* I, 184-185.

⁴⁹¹ See, for example, G. M. Young's *Portrait of an Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), which notes that a survey in the 1830s revealed that: 'At Salford [...] of 1,800 children nominally at school, less than half were taught to read or write. In

in the towns, Hazlitt argued, mass education was unnecessary and might even be harmful in the country: 'If working hard, and living sparingly are the chief lessons meant to be inculcated in their minds, they are already tolerably perfect in their parts.' In summary, Hazlitt concluded: 'it is vain to attempt to make men any thing else but what their situation makes them. [...] The advantages of education in the abstract are, I fear, like other abstractions, not to be found in nature.'⁴⁹² This statement, though it might appear odd coming from an avowed Radical, is consistent with Hazlitt's generally jaundiced view of Utilitarian reformers who, in his opinion, made the mistake of viewing men as if they were machines rather than as individuals with free wills. He describes Jeremy Bentham, for example, as having 'reduced the theory and practice of human life to a *caput mortuum* of reason, and dull, plodding, technical calculation.'⁴⁹³

Hazlitt regarded the kind of reform proposed by Whitbread as a half-measure, which would interfere with the lives of the poor without addressing the underlying problem; the lack of a political voice and thus true representation. He saw Whitbread as, even if well-intentioned, unequal to contend with the 'artifices of designing men, against the sanguine delusions of personal vanity, or the difficulties, delays, the disgust, and probable odium to be encountered in the prosecution of such a task.'⁴⁹⁴ Moreover, Whitbread's relative wealth unfitted him for the task of helping

Liverpool, less than half the child population under fifteen went to school at all.' (p. 59).

⁴⁹² Hazlitt, 'A Reply to Malthus's Essay on Population', *Complete Works* I, 185.

⁴⁹³ Hazlitt, 'The Spirit of the Age: Jeremy Bentham', *Selected Writings* VII, *Liber Amoris; The Spirit of the Age*, ed. by Duncan Wu (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), 77-86 (p. 80).

⁴⁹⁴ Hazlitt, 'A Reply to Malthus's Essay on Population', *Complete Works* I, 185-86.

the poor: '[I]t is not likely that any one should ever prove the *saviour* of the poor, who has not common feelings with them, and who does not know their weaknesses and wants.'⁴⁹⁵ What then, Hazlitt asks, should be done for the poor? The best answer, he suggests, would perhaps be 'Let them alone.'⁴⁹⁶ As Burley points out, some critics have suggested that this implied on Hazlitt's part a laissez-faire attitude to the poor, or an avoidance of the issue. Against this, Burley argues that Hazlitt's cry of 'Let them alone' is 'neither despairing nor apathetic.' He adds: 'The solution, for Hazlitt, was not workhouses, education, saving schemes or the like, but rather the development of a strong and democratic popular opposition movement', which could not be delivered by an unreformed Parliament.⁴⁹⁷ In general, Hazlitt's view was that 'the poor' were quite capable of managing their own affairs, and he may simply have been saying that State interference in such matters as their children's education would reinforce their subservient position, taking away one of the few areas in which they had control over their lives. When Whitbread's proposed reforms to the Poor Laws were defeated in the House of Commons, he drafted a second Bill relating solely to a national system of education; this was passed in the Commons but rejected by the House of Lords.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁵ Hazlitt, 'A Reply to Malthus's Essay on Population', *Complete Works* I, 186.

⁴⁹⁶ Hazlitt, 'A Reply to Malthus's Essay on Population', *Complete Works* I, 186.

⁴⁹⁷ Burley, *Hazlitt the Dissenter*, p. 161.

⁴⁹⁸ See *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 'Whitbread, Samuel (1764-1815)', by D. R. Fisher. <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/29231>> [Accessed 3 January 2017]. Hazlitt's opinion of Whitbread improved. In his 1820 essay 'On the Present State of Parliamentary Eloquence' he refers to the 'late Mr Whitbread' having 'no artifices, no tricks, no reserve [...] his heart was in his broad, honest, English face'. *Complete Works* XVII, 5-21 (p. 9). It is interesting to compare Hazlitt's objections to compulsory education to those of De Quincey (see Chapter five).

Hazlitt and monitorial education

Hazlitt's opposition to the monitorial approach to education embodied in Bell's Madras system centred around his perception of it as a means of ensuring that the Church of England retained control of education (the very reason it was championed by Southey, Coleridge and Wordsworth). He was, however, equally unimpressed by the complicated system of rewards and punishments that was central to Lancaster's non-denominational system. Tom Duggett points out that the second part of Hazlitt's *Round Table* essay 'Observations on Mr Wordsworth's Poem "The Excursion"' lampoons the monitorial system as 'a theatrical diversion from the real work of education.'⁴⁹⁹ Hazlitt, however, avoids the issue of what constitutes 'the real work of education'. By this point, he has moved from his earlier cry of 'Let them alone' to focus on the effects of ignorance on the lower classes, especially those in rural areas: 'They have no knowledge of, and consequently can take no interest in, any thing that is not an object of their senses, and of their daily pursuits. [...] Those who have no enlarged or liberal ideas, can have no disinterested or generous sentiments.'⁵⁰⁰ In this essay, Hazlitt stresses the advantages of reading fiction and studying history, both of which enlarge the mind, the first by carrying us out of ourselves, the second by 'familiarizing us with the great vicissitudes of human affairs.' The study of morals, meanwhile, 'accustoms us to refer our actions to a

⁴⁹⁹ Hazlitt, 'Observations on Mr Wordsworth's Poem "The Excursion"', (1817), *Selected Writings* II, 112-120, cited in Duggett, p. 164. As discussed in Chapter two, Wordsworth, in a note to *The Excursion*, celebrates Bell's 'simple engine' which 'affords marvellous facilities' for providing universal mass education. (Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, Book IX, p. 314).

⁵⁰⁰ Hazlitt, 'Observations on Mr Wordsworth's Poem "The Excursion"' (1817), *Selected Writings* II, 123-24.

general standard of right and wrong', whilst abstract reasoning 'strengthens the love of truth and produces an inflexibility of principle which cannot stoop to low trick and cunning.'⁵⁰¹ Hazlitt's jaundiced view of country people ('All country people hate each other') is here close to Coleridge's sceptical opinion of the advantages of a rural upbringing in the absence of education.⁵⁰² As explained below, Hazlitt was later to come round to Wordsworth's more favourable view of country people.

In his 1819 essay 'What is the People?' Hazlitt included the Bell and Lancaster systems with 'Bible and Missionary, and Auxiliary and Cheap Tract Societies' as encouraging only the type of reading which Church and State deemed 'that sort of food for our stomach, which they thought best.'⁵⁰³ In other words, he saw such systems as a means of a patronising form of State control. There is a prefiguring here of the later trope of 'nanny knows best' in criticisms of the so-called 'nanny state'.

Hazlitt and Classical education

If both the Bell and Lancaster monitorial systems were therefore anathema, what would be a better type of education, from Hazlitt's point of view? In some ways, Hazlitt saw a Classical education as the ideal, but he was not blind to its disadvantages. He wrote two essays on Classical education, several years apart, the first celebrating the benefits, the second focusing on its limitations and dangers. His

⁵⁰¹ Hazlitt, 'Observations on Mr Wordsworth's Poem "The Excursion"' (1817), *Selected Writings* II, 124.

⁵⁰² In Coleridge's words: 'Education, or original sensibility, or both, must pre-exist, if the changes, forms, and incidents of nature are to prove a sufficient stimulant. And where these are not sufficient, the mind contracts and hardens by want of stimulants; and the man becomes selfish, sensual, gross and hard-hearted.' Coleridge, *Collected Works* VII, *Biographia Literaria*, II, 45.

⁵⁰³ Hazlitt, 'What is the People? Concluded', *Selected Writings* IV, *Political Essays*, ed. by Duncan Wu (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), 242-60 (p. 253).

essay entitled 'On Classical Education' was first published in *The Morning Chronicle* in a short version of three paragraphs in September 1813. The essay was republished in an extended form in *The Examiner* in February 1815, and finally reprinted in the *Round Table* (1817). A close comparison of the three versions shows some interesting variations. *The Morning Chronicle* version begins: 'The study of the Classics ought less to be regarded as an exercise of the intellect, than as a "discipline of humanity"'.⁵⁰⁴ In the *Round Table* version, this is strengthened to: 'The study of the Classics is less to be regarded ...'.⁵⁰⁵ The *Morning Chronicle* version states that those who have not benefitted from a Classical education are 'incorrigible to conviction'; the *Round Table* version amends this to 'inaccessible to conviction'. These changes suggest that Hazlitt is both reinforcing his favourable view of the Classics, and exonerating from blame those who have not benefitted from a Classical education; it is not that such people cannot be corrected by convincing arguments because they are stubbornly resistant to them, but that they cannot even be reached by those arguments.

In all three versions, the opening paragraphs give a conventional outline of the benefits of a Classical education:

The peculiar advantage of this mode of education consists not so much in strengthening the understanding, as in softening and refining the taste. It gives men liberal views; it accustoms the mind to take an interest in things foreign to itself; to love virtue for itself; to prefer fame to life, and glory to

⁵⁰⁴ Hazlitt, 'On Classical Education', *New Writings of William Hazlitt*, 2 vols., edited by Duncan Wu (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007) II, 436-38 (pp. 437-38). Wu notes that the phrase a 'discipline of humanity' is borrowed from Lord Bacon (p. 437 n1).

⁵⁰⁵ Hazlitt, 'On Classical Education', *Selected Writings* II, 8-10 (p. 8).

riches; and to fix our thought on the remote and permanent, instead of narrow and fleeting objects.⁵⁰⁶

Looking at the *opposites* of what, in Hazlitt's opinion, a Classical education provides, people lacking such an education would therefore be self-centred, focused on the moment, and prefer riches to fame. These are very much the characteristics Hazlitt would later identify in unscholarly people in such essays as 'On the Ignorance of the Learned' (1818).⁵⁰⁷ Reflecting to some extent the continuing influence of the precepts of Richard Price and other tutors at Hackney New College, Hazlitt continues that a Classical education: 'raises us above that low and servile fear, which bows only to present power and upstart authority.'⁵⁰⁸ Again, looking at the opposite, uneducated people might in Hazlitt's view tend to be fearful of, and subservient to, 'upstart authority'.

Hazlitt identifies two dangers in self-teaching, which, unlike a Classical education, cannot provide a standard of general taste, or scale of opinion, leading inevitably to egotism and to:

[O]bstinate prejudice or petulant fickleness of opinion, according to the natural sluggishness or activity of their minds. For they either become blindly bigotted to the first opinions they have struck out for themselves, and inaccessible to conviction; or else [...] are everlasting converts to every crude

⁵⁰⁶ Hazlitt, 'On Classical Education', *New Writings of William Hazlitt* II, 437; *Complete Works* IV, *The Round Table and Characters of Shakspear's Plays*, ed. by P. P. Howe (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1930), pp. 4-6 (p. 4); *Selected Writings* II, 8-10 (p. 8).

⁵⁰⁷ Hazlitt, 'On the Ignorance of the Learned', *Selected Writings* VI, *Table Talk*, ed. by Duncan Wu (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), pp. 60-67.

⁵⁰⁸ Hazlitt, 'On Classical Education', *Selected Writings* II, 8.

suggestion that presents itself, and the last opinion is always the true one.

Each successive discovery flashes upon them with equal light and evidence, and every new fact overturns their whole system.⁵⁰⁹

In two paragraphs added to the *Round Table* version of the essay, Hazlitt goes on to emphasise the benefits of a Classical education in the use and understanding of language: 'We owe many of our most amiable delusions, and some of our superiority, to the grossness of mere physical existence, to the strength of our associations with words. Language, if it throws a veil over our ideas, adds a softness and refinement to them.'⁵¹⁰ Hazlitt goes on to say that 'Knowledge is only useful in itself, as it exercises or gives pleasure to the mind: the only knowledge that is of use in a practical sense, is professional knowledge.'⁵¹¹ He concludes: 'If the knowledge of language produces pedants, the other kind of knowledge which is proposed to be a substitute for it can only produce quacks.'⁵¹²

This is very close to the distinction between types of knowledge drawn by Wordsworth, as discussed in Chapter two. Coleridge made the same type of distinction. For example, in his marginal notes on Samuel Parr's *A Spital Sermon* (1801), he exclaims: 'O! [...] let us have chemistry as we have watchmakers and surgeons [...] as a *division* of human labour, as a worthy profession for a few, not as a

⁵⁰⁹ Hazlitt, 'On Classical Education', *Selected Writings* II, 9. It is not clear whether Hazlitt regarded himself as having benefitted from a Classical education, or having been disadvantaged by being self-taught.

⁵¹⁰ Hazlitt, 'On Classical Education', *Selected Writings* II, 9.

⁵¹¹ Hazlitt, 'On Classical Education', *Selected Writings* II, 9.

⁵¹² Hazlitt, 'On Classical Education', *Selected Writings* II, 9-10.

glittering master-feature of [...] education.’⁵¹³ Hazlitt, then, in common with both Wordsworth and Coleridge, identifies a hierarchy of education, with Classical education at the top, and intrinsically superior to vocational or ‘useful’ education. Coleridge, however, sees vocational learning as ‘worthy’, whereas for Hazlitt it produces only ‘quacks’, and for Wordsworth, it would flood the labour market: ‘I cannot see how Society will be benefited by swarms of medical Practitioners starting up from the lower classes in the community.’⁵¹⁴

At the end of his essay ‘On Classical Education’ as printed in *The Examiner*, Hazlitt added a lengthy paragraph on the education of women, omitted from the *Round Table* version.⁵¹⁵ In this paragraph, having said that a classical education ‘is not at all suited for women’, Hazlitt states that a Classical education would be not only useless, but positively harmful for women, because their minds were essentially different to men’s: ‘We do not think a classical education proper for women. It may pervert their minds, but it cannot elevate them.’⁵¹⁶ In Hazlitt’s opinion it is reasonable for a woman to learn modern languages, because she ‘may have a lover who is a Frenchman, or an Italian, or a Spaniard, and it is well to be provided against

⁵¹³ Coleridge, *Collected Works* XII, *Marginalia* IV, *Pamphlets to Shakespeare*, ed. by H. J. Jackson and George Whalley (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2000), p. 28.

⁵¹⁴ William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* III, 371.

⁵¹⁵ In his notes on the *Round Table* essay, Wu refers to an additional paragraph in the *Examiner* version relating to the education of women but quotes only the first sentence from it (*Selected Writings* II, 342, note 6). Howe gives *The Examiner* paragraph in full in his edition of Hazlitt’s *Complete Works*; see Hazlitt, ‘Education of Women’, *Complete Works* XX, *Miscellaneous Writings*, ed. by P. P. Howe (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1934), pp. 41-42.

⁵¹⁶ Hazlitt, ‘Education of Women’, pp. 41-42.

every contingency in that way', but the ancient Greeks and Romans, and their history, can have no such interest for her.⁵¹⁷ Hazlitt then broadens his attack:

Women in general have no ideas, except personal ones. They are mere egotists. They have no passion for truth, nor any love of what is purely ideal. They hate to think, and they hate every one who seems to think of any thing but themselves. Everything is to them a perfect nonentity which does not touch their senses, their vanity, or their interest. Their poetry, their criticism, their politics, their morality, and their divinity, are downright affectation. [...] There is no instance of a woman having been a great mathematician or metaphysician or poet or painter: but they can dance and sing and act and write novels and fall in love, which last quality alone makes more than angels of them.⁵¹⁸

Women are, in Hazlitt's opinion, lacking in principle, but conservative by nature:

'They want principle, except that which consists in an adherence to established custom, and this is the reason of the severe laws which have been set up as a barrier against every infringement of decorum and propriety in women.'⁵¹⁹ At this stage, the only concession Hazlitt makes in favour of women's minds over men's is that they have more 'fancy', which he defines as 'greater flexibility of mind', and a greater ability to 'readily vary and separate their ideas at leisure.'⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁷ Hazlitt, 'Education of Women', p. 41.

⁵¹⁸ Hazlitt, 'Education of Women', pp. 41-42.

⁵¹⁹ Hazlitt, 'Education of Women', pp. 41-42.

⁵²⁰ Hazlitt, 'Education of Women', p. 42.

Hazlitt's opinion of women's minds was not an unusual one at the time. Coleridge, for example, held that women's minds were fundamentally different to men's and, arguing against Mary Wollstonecraft's advocacy of co-education, asserted in one of his lectures on education that 'woman only could educate woman.'⁵²¹ The paragraph in 'On Classical Education', however displays an underlying misogyny. 'On Classical Education' pre-dates by several years what became known as the *Liber Amoris* episode, in which Hazlitt became infatuated with Sarah Walker, his landlady's daughter. Hazlitt, assuming that Sarah was aware of his feelings towards her, divorced his first wife, intending to marry Sarah, but she indicated to a mutual friend that she would refuse any proposal of marriage from Hazlitt.⁵²² Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the paragraph added to the *Examiner* version has been ignored by Hazlitt's recent biographers, who focus on Hazlitt as a Radical thinker and tend to overlook any evidence that shows him to have been ultra-conservative in certain respects. (It is worth noting in this context that despite their fathers' conservative reputations, Wordsworth's daughter Dora, Coleridge's daughter Sara, and Southey's daughter Edith were all taught Latin.)

⁵²¹ Coleridge, *Collected Works* V, I, 594-5. In one of the many ironies in Coleridge's life, his daughter Sara was taught by a man (Southey) following the breakdown of Coleridge's marriage.

⁵²² The episode is documented from Hazlitt's viewpoint in *Liber Amoris; or, The New Pygmalion* (1823), *Selected Writings* VII, pp. 7-73. The book was published under a pseudonym, but Hazlitt was quickly unmasked as the author. The affair proved immensely damaging to Hazlitt's reputation, both as a writer and as an individual. Wu ascribes Hazlitt's later derogatory remarks about women, for example in *Characteristics* (1823), to the effects of the *Liber Amoris* affair. As Wu puts it: 'Few things [...] are more resonant than his observations on women, which (though unfair) bespeak a disillusionment understandable in the light of recent events.' (Wu, p. 340). It seems more likely that Hazlitt's ideas about women were the cause rather than the effect of the Sarah Walker debacle.

As mentioned above, Hazlitt, whilst a student at Hackney, 'devoured' Rousseau's writings, and a section in *Emile* (1763) may perhaps have informed his thinking about women's minds. Rousseau wrote:

The quest for abstract and speculative truths, principles, and axioms in the sciences, for everything that tends to generalize ideas, is not within the competence of women. [...] Regarding what is not immediately connected with their duties, all the reflections of women ought to be directed to the study of men or to the pleasing kinds of knowledge that have only taste as their aim.⁵²³

In summary: 'Woman has more wit, man more genius; woman observes, and man reasons.' Rousseau's conclusion about the role of women may explain why Hazlitt went so badly wrong in his relationship with Sarah Walker; Rousseau suggests that women should 'make a profound study of the mind of man [...] learn to penetrate their sentiments by their words, their actions, their looks, their gestures.'⁵²⁴ The mistake Hazlitt may have made was to assume that Sarah Walker understood his feelings towards her, whilst she probably took his compliments to be nothing more than mild flirtation.

Hazlitt expanded on the arguments around Classical education in another *Round Table* essay, 'On Pedantry' (1817). Here, he begins to tease out the dangers that accompany Classical learning, alongside its attractions:

Learning and pedantry were formerly synonymous; and it was well when they were so. Can there be a higher satisfaction than for a man to understand

⁵²³ Rousseau, *Emile*, p. 386.

⁵²⁴ Rousseau, *Emile*, p. 387.

Greek, and to believe that there is nothing else worth understanding?

Learning is the knowledge of that which is not generally known. What an ease and a dignity in pretensions, founded on the ignorance of others! What a pleasure in wondering, what a pride in being wondered at!⁵²⁵

This is a very similar critique of a type of learning to that made by Wordsworth, who was fundamentally opposed to the sort of ‘book-learning’ which imparted only knowledge of ‘things of no value in themselves, but as they show cleverness.’⁵²⁶

Hazlitt goes on to consider the value of the ‘learned languages’:

Again, it may be questioned whether, in matters of mere human reasoning, much has been gained by the disuse of the learned languages. [...] If certain follies have been exposed by being stripped of their formal disguise, others have had a greater chance of succeeding, by being presented in a more pleasing and popular shape. [...] A species of universal suffrage is introduced in letters, which is only applicable to politics. The good old Latin style of our forefathers, if it concealed the dulness of the writer, at least was a barrier against the impertinence, flippancy, and ignorance of the reader.⁵²⁷

Here Hazlitt seems to see the learned languages as a kind of *cordon sanitaire* to protect certain types of knowledge from the ignorant, whilst asserting, almost in passing, that universal (presumably male) suffrage *is* applicable to politics. This was a radical view for the time; as outlined in Chapter one, most of those who advocated extension of the franchise envisaged a ‘gradualist’ approach, with universal suffrage

⁵²⁵ Hazlitt, ‘On Pedantry’, *Selected Writings* II, 82-85 (p. 83).

⁵²⁶ See Chapter two.

⁵²⁷ Hazlitt, ‘On Pedantry’, p. 84.

a distant future goal, and many retreated into even more conservative views about electoral reform following the political unrest immediately after the end of the Napoleonic Wars.⁵²⁸

In the second instalment of this essay, 'The Same Subject Continued' (1817), Hazlitt describes the attraction of a narrow scholastic life to a certain type of person:

The book-worm, buried in the depth of his researches, may well say to the obtrusive shifting realities of the world - 'Leave me to my repose!' We have seen an instance of a poetical enthusiast, who would have passed his life very comfortably in the contemplation of *his own idea*, if he had not been disturbed in his reverie by the Reviewers, and for our own parts, we think we could pass our lives very learnedly and classically in one of the quadrangles of Oxford, without any idea at all, vegetating merely on the air of the place.⁵²⁹

Hazlitt here identifies what he was later to highlight as the main drawback of advanced Classical education; its tendency to isolate individuals from first-hand experience of the world and its concerns. Herschel Baker surely misreads the satirical tone of this passage when he writes that it suggests Hazlitt 'dreamed of

⁵²⁸ Both Southey and Wordsworth, for instance, moved in the space of a few years from viewing Parliamentary reform as desirable to seeing even limited reform as a precursor to the collapse of society. Wordsworth wrote in 1835 'The Reform bill I have ever deemed an unwise measure. [...] We are now about to gather the fruits of it in sorrow and repentance.' William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *Letters* VI, 8. Southey wrote in 1833 of the reformed House of Commons containing 'one hundred thorough-going revolutionaries', *New Letters of Robert Southey*, ed. by Kenneth Curry (New York, Columbia University Press, 1965), II, p. 190. See also Mark Storey, *Robert Southey, A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 195 and p. 324.

⁵²⁹ Hazlitt, 'The Same Subject Continued' (1817), *Selected Writings* II, 86-89 (p. 86). In his notes to this essay, Wu indicates that Howe suggested that the 'poetical thinker' was Wordsworth.

having been a don at Oxford.⁵³⁰ It is of course possible that Hazlitt might at times have wished to withdraw from the bustle and aggravations of life as a literary hack, but it is difficult to imagine him wanting to ‘vegetate’ anywhere.

Hazlitt and Utilitarian education

Despite these reservations, Hazlitt’s mainly positive view of Classical education and his corresponding distaste for ‘useful’ education around this time is demonstrated further in his response to a proposal in 1814 to build a ‘Chrestomatic’ school on the site of Milton’s garden, bordering Hazlitt’s house in York Place, which he rented from Jeremy Bentham. Hazlitt wrote:

They propose to erect a Chrestomatic school, by cutting down some fine old trees on the classic ground where Milton thought and wrote, to introduce a rabble of children who for the Greek and Latin languages, poetry, and history, that fine pabulum of useful enthusiasm, that breath of immortality infused into our youthful blood, that balm and cordial of our future years, are to be drugged with chemists and apothecaries’ receipts, are to be taught to do every thing, and to see and feel nothing.⁵³¹

This, with its sneering at ‘apothecaries’, could almost have come from the anonymous reviewer in *Blackwood’s Magazine*, who wrote in a review of Keats’

⁵³⁰ Baker, p. 120.

⁵³¹ Hazlitt, ‘On People of Sense’, Selected Writings VI, *The Plain Speaker*, ed. by Duncan Wu (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), pp. 226-235 (p. 232). The OED defines ‘Chrestomatic’ as ‘Devoted to the learning of useful matters’.
<<http://www.oed.com.bris.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/32410?redirectedFrom=chrestomathic#eid>> [Accessed 5 January 2017]. It is possible that Hazlitt incorrectly interpreted the word as relating mainly or wholly to chemistry. The school, never actually built, was to have taught around a thousand pupils, and to have been run on the monitorial system of Joseph Lancaster. See Elissa S. Itzkin, ‘Bentham’s Chrestomathia: Utilitarian Legacy to English Education’ in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Volume 39:2 (Apr. - Jun., 1978), pp. 303-316.

Endymion: 'It is a better and a wiser thing to be a starved apothecary than a starved poet, so back to the shop, Mister John, back to "plaisters, pills and ointment boxes.'" ⁵³² It is particularly ironic that Milton himself, in his ideas for model academies, deprecated the over-reliance on the Classics at grammar and public schools and envisaged a broad curriculum not dissimilar to that proposed for the Chrestomathic school. Wu comments, somewhat disingenuously, that it was not the type of education to which Hazlitt objected, but the site of the school. Hazlitt's condemnation of a type of education by which children are 'taught to do everything, and to see and feel nothing' seems however unequivocal. ⁵³³

Classical education: Hazlitt's change of mind

Hazlitt's second essay on the theme of Classical education, 'On the Ignorance of the Learned' (1818), goes further in turning the argument in favour of a Classical education in 'On Classical Education' on its head. 'On the Ignorance of the Learned' is aimed firmly at criticizing the limitations of the narrow Classical education provided by grammar and public schools and Oxbridge colleges, and against which both Milton, in 'Of Education' and Locke in *Some Thoughts on Education* had previously railed:

Any one who has passed through the regular gradations of a classical education, and is not made a fool by it, may consider himself as having had a very narrow escape. [...] Memory (and that of the lowest kind) is the chief

⁵³² Anonymous, 'The Cockney School of Poetry', *Blackwood's Magazine*, Number XIII:III, p. 524.

⁵³³ In Wu's words 'It was not that Hazlitt was against education but that he saw a hideous irony to which the Utilitarians were blind: the trees under which Milton composed the greatest poem in the English language stood on sacred ground.' (Wu, p. 168).

faculty called into play; in conning over and repeating lessons by rote in grammar, in languages, in geography, arithmetic &c so that he who has the most of this technical memory, with the least turn for other things [...] will make the most forward school-boy.⁵³⁴

Again echoing Locke, and with perhaps a wry recollection of his over-studious younger self, Hazlitt points out that at the age of ten children are not naturally inclined to study 'the jargon containing the definitions of the parts of speech, the rules for casting up an account, or the inflections of a Greek verb.' Consequently, the child most likely to excel at school is 'A lad with a sickly constitution, and no very active mind, who can just retain what is pointed out to him, and has neither sagacity to distinguish nor spirit to enjoy for himself.' By contrast, 'An Idler at school [...] is who has high health and spirits, and who has the free use of his limbs, with all his wits about him. [...] [W]hat passes for stupidity is much oftener a want of interest, of a sufficient motive to fix the attention, and forever a reluctant application to the dry and unmeaning pursuits of school-learning.'⁵³⁵ The wording here calls to mind Wordsworth's lines in 'The Tables Turned' (1798): 'Enough of Science and of Art;/Close up those barren leaves'.⁵³⁶

Hazlitt, again using terms not dissimilar to those used by Wordsworth in distinguishing between types of knowledge, goes on to examine what is meant by 'learning' as opposed to 'knowledge':

⁵³⁴ Hazlitt, 'On the Ignorance of the Learned', *Selected Writings* VI, 60-66 (pp. 61-2).

⁵³⁵ Hazlitt, 'On the Ignorance of the Learned', *Selected Writings* VI, 62.

⁵³⁶ Wordsworth, 'The Tables Turned', lines 29-30, in *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by Michael Mason (London: Longman, 1992), p. 100.

Learning is the knowledge of that which is not generally known to others, and which we can only derive at second-hand from books or other artificial sources. [...] Learning is the knowledge of that which none but the learned know. He is the most learned man who knows the most of what is farthest removed from common life and actual observation, that is of the least practical utility, and least liable to be brought to the test of experience. [...] It is seeing with the eyes of others, hearing with their ears, and pinning our faith on their understandings. The learned man prides himself on the knowledge of names, and dates, not of men or things.⁵³⁷

Hazlitt singles out the eminent classicist Richard Porson as the exception amongst scholars who proved the general rule: 'a man that, by uniting talents and knowledge with learning, made the distinction between them more striking and palpable.'⁵³⁸

Hazlitt then outlines what he sees as the adverse consequences of this narrow approach to education:

The labourers in this vineyard seem as if it were their object to confound all common sense, and the distinctions of good and evil, by means of traditional maxims, and preconceived notions, taken upon trust, and increasing in absurdity, with increase of age. They pile hypothesis upon hypothesis, mountain high, till it is impossible to come at the plain truth on any question. They see things, not as they are, but as they find them in books; and 'wink and

⁵³⁷ Hazlitt, 'On the Ignorance of the Learned', *Selected Writings* VI, 62-63.

⁵³⁸ Hazlitt, 'On the Ignorance of the Learned', *Selected Writings* VI, 63.

shut their apprehensions up' in order that they may discover nothing to interfere with their prejudices, or convince them of their absurdity.⁵³⁹

It is interesting that Hazlitt now sees prejudice as one consequence of a Classical education, which he had in his earlier essay identified as a means of *avoiding* prejudice. Placing a different emphasis on his argument in 'On Classical Education' that 'Language, if it throws a veil over our ideas, adds a softness and refinement to them', Hazlitt now states that: 'The object of books is to teach us ignorance; that is, to throw a veil over nature, and persuade us that things are not as they are, but what the writer pretends them to be.'⁵⁴⁰ Again, Hazlitt's position here is close to Wordsworth's suspicious view of 'book-learning' as a barrier between an individual and the outside world. There is also an echo of Rousseau's poor opinion of books as a means of imparting knowledge: 'I hate books. They only teach one to talk about what one does not know.'⁵⁴¹

In addition to criticizing the narrow viewpoint that a Classical education tends to produce in the learned, in this essay Hazlitt celebrates the contrasting advantages that the uneducated possess: 'The common people [...] understand their own business and the characters of those they have to deal with; for it is necessary that they should. They have eloquence to express their passions, and sit at will to

⁵³⁹ Hazlitt, 'On the Ignorance of the Learned', *Selected Writings* VI, 65. Wu notes that the words 'wink and shut their apprehensions up' are a near-quote from John Marston's play *Antonio's Revenge*. (p. 308, n18). The phrase 'The labourers in this vineyard' is an allusion to a parable of Jesus (Matthew 20:1-16), but the parable seems to have no particular relevance to Hazlitt's argument.

⁵⁴⁰ Hazlitt, 'On the Ignorance of the Learned', *Selected Writings* VI, 65.

⁵⁴¹ Rousseau, *Emile*, p. 184.

express their contempt and provoke laughter.’⁵⁴² As in his essay on Whitbread’s proposed system of mass education, Hazlitt is insistent that ‘the vulgar’ do not need to be told what to think: ‘Above all, the mass of society have common sense, which the learned of all ages want. The vulgar are in the right when they judge for themselves; they are wrong when they trust to their blind guides.’⁵⁴³

In praising the uneducated at the expense of scholars, Hazlitt also softens somewhat his view of women’s minds from that expressed in ‘On Classical Education’: ‘Women often have more of what is called *good sense* than men. [...] They do not think or speak by rule, and they have in general more eloquence and wit, as well as sense, on that account.’⁵⁴⁴ Hazlitt concludes ‘On the Ignorance of the Learned’ with a contrast between Shakespeare and his critics: ‘Shakespear’s was evidently an uneducated mind, both in the freshness of his imagination and the variety of his views. [...] If we wish to know the force of human genius, we should read Shakespear. If we wish to see the insignificance of human learning, we may study his commentators.’⁵⁴⁵ There is more than a hint of irony here, given Hazlitt’s own Shakespearean criticism; Hazlitt seems to be viewing himself with detachment, as someone who has been to some extent spoiled by his education, and also deprecating his own writing as ‘insignificant’ compared with the ‘genius’ of Shakespeare.

⁵⁴² Hazlitt, ‘On the Ignorance of the Learned’, *Selected Writings* VI, 65.

⁵⁴³ Hazlitt, ‘On the Ignorance of the Learned’, *Selected Writings* VI, 65.

⁵⁴⁴ Hazlitt, ‘On the Ignorance of the Learned’, *Selected Writings* VI, 66.

⁵⁴⁵ Hazlitt, ‘On the Ignorance of the Learned’, *Selected Writings* VI, 66.

Unless one chooses to see 'On the Ignorance of the Learned' as a purely rhetorical exercise, it represents a considerable change of mind on Hazlitt's part from his stance in 'On Classical Education'. Why did Hazlitt's opinion change so dramatically? There are several possible reasons. The (Classically educated) writers of *Blackwood's Magazine* frequently used the lack of a Classical education as a stick with which to beat writers of the 'Cockney School' such as Keats, and Hazlitt would clearly wish to be on the opposite side of the argument from them. Indeed, whether genuinely or as a ruse, the editors of *Blackwood's* chose to read 'On the Ignorance of the Learned' as a personal attack, although, as Hazlitt pointed out in his reply to Blackwood's article 'Hazlitt Cross-Questioned', the essay opens with an apposite quotation from *A Satyr Upon the Imperfection and Abuse of Human Learning*, a poem attributed to Samuel Butler (1613-1680), who could hardly be seen as part of the Cockney School. As Hazlitt put it: 'The motto to that article expresses the whole doctrine of it, and is taken from Butler. Was he too one of a Cockney crew, or did he wish to depreciate learning from the want of it?'⁵⁴⁶ The quotation from Butler ends: 'Yet he that is but able to express/No sense at all in several languages/Will pass for learned than he that's known/To speak the strongest reason in his own', which is, indeed, the key point that Hazlitt makes in the essay; that book-learning often disguises a lack of knowledge of the world and disqualifies the learned from the common sense approach to life of the uneducated.

More significantly, perhaps, Hazlitt was increasingly of Horne Tooke's view that the use of scholarly language and jargon by those in authority was all too often a

⁵⁴⁶ Hazlitt, 'A Reply to "Z"', *Complete Works IX, A Reply to 'Z', A Letter to William Gifford, Liber Amoris, Characteristics, &c.*, ed. by P. P. Howe (London, J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1932), pp. 3-10 (p. 8). See also Maclean, p. 390 and Wu, pp. 254-59.

ruse to conceal the truth. As Tooke wrote: ‘Truth, in my opinion, has been improperly imagined at the bottom of a well; it lies much nearer to the surface, though buried indeed at present under mountains of learned rubbish.’⁵⁴⁷ This was not merely an academic argument; Tooke saw close verbal reasoning, using plain English, as essential if ordinary people were to successfully defend themselves against injustice, as ‘words without meaning, or of equivocal meanings, are the everlasting engines of fraud and injustice.’⁵⁴⁸ Hazlitt’s essay on Tooke in *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), though hedged with reservations about Tooke’s limitations, demonstrates his regard for Tooke’s ability to perceive the underlying truth: ‘There is a web of old associations wound round language, that is a kind of veil over its natural features; and custom puts on the mask of ignorance. But this veil, this mask [Tooke] threw aside, and penetrated to the naked truth of things.’⁵⁴⁹ Hazlitt was coming to see the ‘charm’ of language as a tool of oppression, which sometimes required a ‘hard, unbending, concrete, physical, half-savage’ person such as Tooke to strip it from the ‘clothing of habit or sentiment, or the disguises of doting pedantry.’⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁷ John Horne Tooke, *Diversions of Purley*, Part I, p. 15, cited in Susan Manly, *Language, Custom, and Nation in the 1790s: Locke, Tooke, Wordsworth, Edgeworth* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 49.

⁵⁴⁸ John Horne Tooke, *Diversions of Purley*, Part I, pp. 103-4, cited in Manly, p. 13.

⁵⁴⁹ Hazlitt, ‘The Spirit of the Age: The Late Mr Horne Tooke’, *Selected Writings* VII, 114-23 (p. 120). Hazlitt’s description of Tooke is in many ways also a self-portrait; he describes with admiration Tooke’s ability to argue effectively on both sides of any question, and to shock others’ prejudices. Hazlitt was an early admirer of Tooke and incorporated many of Tooke’s ideas about language in his own *New and Improved Grammar of the English Language* (1809).

⁵⁵⁰ Hazlitt, ‘The Spirit of the Age: The Late Mr Horne Tooke’, *Selected Writings* VII, 120.

In this essay, Hazlitt adopts Wordsworth's rather than Coleridge's approach to language. Wordsworth believed that the best language for poetry was 'language really used by men', particularly those involved in rural occupations. Coleridge's view, by contrast, was that to avoid ambiguity, language must be precise, and, particularly in poetry, needed to be protected by the educated from corruption. Their dispute arose from Wordsworth's Preface and Essay supplementing the second and subsequent editions of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800 and 1802). In the Preface, Wordsworth states that his poems are about 'incidents and situations from common life', and are 'described, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men.' Such language, Wordsworth claims:

Is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets, who think that they are conferring honour upon themselves and their art, in proportion as they separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression, in order to furnish food for fickle tastes, and fickle appetites, of their own creation.⁵⁵¹

Coleridge's contrasting views on the subject are set out in detail in *Biographia Literaria*, (1817) in which he defines 'blameless style' as '*untranslatable*ness in words of the same language without injury to the meaning'. He continues:

Be it observed, however, that I include in the *meaning* of a word not only its correspondent object, but likewise all the associations which it recalls. [...] I believe not only from grounds of reason, but from [...] actual though limited experience, that to a youth led from his first boyhood to investigate the

⁵⁵¹ Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802), in *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by Michael Mason. pp. 55-87 (pp. 59-61).

meaning of every word and the reason of its choice and position, Logic presents itself as an old acquaintance under new names.⁵⁵²

In his poetical criticism, Hazlitt consistently favoured Wordsworth's use of simple everyday language over 'poetic language', denying that it was unsuited to elevated themes. As he put it: 'The extreme simplicity which some persons have objected to Mr. Wordsworth's poetry, is to be found only in the subject and the style: the sentiments are subtle and profound.'⁵⁵³ Hazlitt saw Wordsworth's 'popular, inartificial style' as having got rid of 'all the trappings of verse, [...] all the high places of poetry [...] All the traditions of learning, all the superstitions of age, are obliterated and effaced.'⁵⁵⁴

In the introductory remarks to his 'Lectures on the Age of Elizabeth' (1820), Hazlitt outlines another argument against an exclusively Classical education:

One cause that might be pointed out here, as having contributed to the long-continued neglect of our earlier writers, lies in the very nature of our academic institutions, which unavoidably neutralizes a taste for the productions of native genius, estranges the mind from the history of our own literature, and makes it in each successive age like a book sealed. The Greek and Roman classics are a sort of privileged text-books [...], in a University education, and leave little leisure for a competent acquaintance with, or due

⁵⁵² Coleridge, *Collected Works* VII, *Biographia Literaria*, II, 142.

⁵⁵³ Hazlitt, 'Observations on Mr Wordsworth's poem "The Excursion": The Same Subject Continued' (1817), *Selected Writings* II, 121-25 (p. 121).

⁵⁵⁴ Hazlitt, 'The Spirit of the Age: Mr Wordsworth', *Selected Writings* VII, 161-69 (p. 162).

admiration of, a whole host of able writers of our own, who are suffered to moulder in obscurity on the shelves of our libraries.⁵⁵⁵

In Hazlitt's view, this focus on the Classics in the universities had resulted in an unnatural separation between the 'learned professors' and 'the reading public', with the result that, with a few exceptions, English writers did not receive the attention they deserved, as 'pedantry has combined with ignorance to cancel their unsatisfied claims.'⁵⁵⁶

Another drawback of Classical education that Hazlitt identified was the unthinking use of a Roman style of rhetoric by contemporary politicians. Discussing Cicero in one of his conversations with James Northcote, Hazlitt comments: 'I see that Canning borrowed his tautology from Cicero, who runs on with such expressions as 'I will *bear*, I will *suffer*, I will *endure* any extremity'. This is bad enough in the original: it is inexcusable in the copy.'⁵⁵⁷ Hazlitt rejected the often-made comparison between Cicero and Burke, pointing out what he saw as Burke's superiority:

Burke has been compared to Cicero, I do not know for what reason. Their excellences are as different, and indeed as opposite, as they well can be.

Burke had not the polished elegance; the glossy neatness, the artful

⁵⁵⁵ Hazlitt, 'Lectures on the Age of Elizabeth: General View of the Subject', *Selected Writings V, Lectures on the English Comic Writers; Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the age of Elizabeth; A Letter to William Gifford, Esq.*, ed. by Duncan Wu (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), 159-74 (p. 163).

⁵⁵⁶ Hazlitt, 'Lectures on the Age of Elizabeth: General View of the Subject', p. 163.

⁵⁵⁷ Hazlitt, 'Conversations with Northcote: Conversation the Twenty-First' (1830), *Complete Works XI, The Spirit of the Age and Conversations of James Northcote, Esq., R.A.*, ed by P. P. Howe (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1932), 309-16 (p. 316).

regularity, the exquisite modulation of Cicero: he had a thousand times more richness and originality of mind, more strength and pomp of diction.⁵⁵⁸

Hazlitt also deplored the tendency of Classically educated writers to rely too much on the Greek and Latin authors whose works they had learned by rote at school. Stephen Cheeke points out that this was a charge Hazlitt made against Byron in particular, Hazlitt claiming that Byron's writing was 'a tissue of superb common-places; even his paradoxes are *common-place*. They are familiar in the schools.'⁵⁵⁹ As Cheeke comments: 'the repeated charge of producing "common-places" is partly directed at Byron's ability to draw upon a stock of classical quotations, allusions, tags and mottoes available to him as a result of his liberal education at Harrow.'⁵⁶⁰ This echoes a charge made against classical education by Locke in *Some Thoughts*

Concerning Education:

Languages are to be learn'd only by reading, and talking, and not by scraps of Authors got by heart; which when a Man's Head is stuff'd with, he has got the just Furniture of a Pedant, and 'tis the ready way to make him one; than which nothing is less becoming a Gentleman. For what can be more ridiculous, than to mix the rich and handsome Thoughts and Sayings of others, with a deal of poor Stuff of his own; which is thereby the more exposed.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁸ Hazlitt, 'Conversations with Northcote: Conversation the Twenty-First' (1830), *Complete Works* XI, 312.

⁵⁵⁹ Hazlitt, 'The Spirit of the Age: Lord Byron', *Selected Writings* VII, 134-142 (p. 141).

⁵⁶⁰ Stephen Cheeke, 'Byron and the Horation Commonplace' in *The Byron Journal*, Volume 36:1 (2008), 5-17, (p. 5).

⁵⁶¹ Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, p. 231.

Locke is in turn echoing the view expressed by both Castiglione in *The Book of the Courtier* (1528) and by Montaigne in his *Essais* (1580) that, whilst knowledge of the Classical languages is an essential accomplishment, pedantry is unbecoming to a gentleman. Hazlitt's argument against Byron is, of course, undermined a little by his own liberal use of quotations in his essays, mostly from English authors, and often misquoted from memory.

The education of Hazlitt's son

Whatever Hazlitt's misgivings about Classical education, it would have been his preference for his son's education. His only surviving son, William, was brought up by his first wife following their divorce, though Hazlitt, with help from his second wife, partly funded his education, and took a close interest in his progress. Up to the age of twelve, he attended Dawson's School in London, where his cousin, also called William Hazlitt, was already a pupil, and is recorded as taking lessons in Latin grammar, taught by Charles Lamb's sister Mary.⁵⁶²

Hazlitt wanted his son to go on to Charterhouse School; as he told James Northcote: 'I thought of the Charter-House, if I could compass it. I liked those old established places where learning grew over hundreds of years, better than any new-fangled experiments or modern seminaries.'⁵⁶³ (This is ironic, as Charterhouse

⁵⁶² Perceval Presland Howe, *The Life of William Hazlitt*, (London: Martin Secker, 1928), p. 327.

⁵⁶³ Baker, p. 120; 'Conversations with Northcote: Conversation the Ninth' (1830), *Complete Works* XI, 234-42 (p. 237). Charterhouse was in vogue at this time, having adopted Andrew Bell's methods of teaching under its dynamic young headmaster, the Rev John Russell, who took up his post at the age of twenty-four. Under Russell, pupil numbers rose rapidly after the introduction of Bell's system in 1811, from under 100 to 238 by 1818, and 480 by 1825. See Ben Weinreb and Christopher Hibbert (eds.) *The London Encyclopaedia* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 142. Godwin's son studied at Charterhouse for three years, and as mentioned in Chapter two, Wordsworth wanted his two sons to attend the school.

had itself recently adopted the ‘new-fangled’ teaching methods of Bell’s Madras system, but Hazlitt was probably unaware of this). Hazlitt’s opposition to ‘modern seminaries’ may have stemmed from his own abortive education at Hackney New College, but was also part of his wider opposition to the Utilitarian ideas of such educational reformers as Jeremy Bentham and Henry Brougham. In the event, Hazlitt’s son went to a boarding school in Tavistock, Devon, run by an Anglican clergyman, probably so that he could be near his mother and grandmother. A Dissenting Academy might have provided a broader-based education, but Hazlitt may have seen such an education as disadvantageous in ‘worldly’ terms, and along with his distaste for the narrowness of dissenting communities, his own educational experience at Hackney was not encouraging. Moreover, the Dissenting Academies were by this time entering a long period of decline, and the choice of school may in any case have been outside Hazlitt’s control.

In a letter to his son when he was about to go to boarding school, later published in a shortened form as ‘On the Conduct of Life, Or, Advice to a Schoolboy’ (1825), Hazlitt sets out what he perceives to be the best education, together with hints about behaviour.⁵⁶⁴ This letter is perhaps the fullest statement of Hazlitt’s mature views on education, and draws, poignantly, on his own experiences and regrets. Given the context, it can also be seen as being meant to be taken literally, rather than as a rhetorical exercise. Along with the ‘valuable social skills’ of French

⁵⁶⁴ The letter is given in full in *Letters*, pp. 216-36. The essay ‘On the Conduct of Life; Or, Advice to a Schoolboy’ was published in the French edition of *The Round Table* in 1825 (Hazlitt, *Complete Works* XVII, 86-100), but was unpublished in Britain during Hazlitt’s lifetime. (See Hazlitt, *Letters*, p. 216 n1). Hazlitt’s son was at this time, by all accounts, and by Hazlitt’s own admission, thoroughly spoilt and had appalling manners. He was, for example, described by Keats as ‘that little Nero’: *Selected Letters of John Keats*, ed. by Robert Gittings, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970, reprinted 1982), p. 211.

and dancing, Hazlitt suggests that his son learns Latin, as 'I learnt it myself, and I would not have you without any of the advantages or sources of knowledge that I possessed - it would be a bar of separation between us - and secondly, because there is an atmosphere round this sort of classical ground, to which that of actual life is gross and vulgar.'⁵⁶⁵ Hazlitt goes on to quote further conventional arguments in favour of learning the Classics which he had outlined in 'On Classical Education' and 'Observations on Mr Wordsworth's Poem "The Excursion"'. As was the case with Wordsworth, Hazlitt's wish to see his son succeed in life was in some ways at odds with his theoretical views about the value of education; here he seems to be lapsing into truism and conventional thinking in attempting to guide his son.

Balancing the arguments in favour of a Classical education, Hazlitt warns about the dangers of becoming *only* a scholar, which he had identified in 'On the Ignorance of the Learned':

There is one almost certain drawback on a course of scholastic study, that it unfits men for active life. [...] We must think again before we determine, and thus the opportunity of action is lost. While we are considering the very best possible mode of gaining an object, we find that it has slipped through our fingers, or that others have laid rude, fearless hands upon it. [...] It is the vice

⁵⁶⁵ Hazlitt, 'On the Conduct of Life; Or, Advice to a Schoolboy', *Complete Works* XVII, 91. Baker suggests that Hazlitt had allowed his own schoolboy Latin and Greek to fade; 'As it was, he remembered only enough Latin to cite a few tags and deplore Cicero's effect on English style; of the Greek and Hebrew prescribed for him at Hackney not a trace remained.' (Baker, p. 119). Baker's slightly tenuous source for this suggestion is a brief section in one of Hazlitt's conversations with Northcote (*Complete Works* XI, 316), where Hazlitt deplores Canning's use of a Ciceronian rhetorical style. However, it is clear from other evidence that Hazlitt's Greek, at least, had deteriorated; for example, he writes of trying to read Plato's *Dialogues* in Thomas Taylor's translation; see 'On Reading New Books' (1827), *Complete Works* XVII, 200-211 (p. 203&n).

of scholars to suppose that there is no knowledge of the world but that of books. Do you avoid it, I conjure you; and thereby save yourself the pain and mortification that must otherwise ensue from finding out your mistake continually!⁵⁶⁶

Perhaps inevitably, much of this well-meant advice went unheeded, and Hazlitt's son, having, to his father's dismay, set his heart on being a professional singer, found it difficult to settle to a career when this ambition failed; he finally settled to a permanent job at the age of forty-three.⁵⁶⁷

Conclusion

In general terms, Hazlitt's opinions on education reflect, albeit with considerable reservations, the contemporary 'progressive' view, developed from Milton, Locke, Rousseau and Edgeworth, that more is learnt if learning is made enjoyable, and that the development of a child's character and manners is more important than mere 'book-learning'. Hazlitt was ambivalent about the value of Classical education. He saw it as giving a broader view of life and providing an abstract standard of 'good' divorced from transient values and fashions. Against this, he believed that it often led to pedantry in its worst form, providing only a narrow, sterile and self-contained knowledge, which prevented an individual from experiencing anything at first hand. Only the very best scholars could transcend such pedantry, by combining knowledge with learning. As Hazlitt puts it in his late essay 'The Shyness of Scholars' (1827): 'the most enlightened and accomplished scholars

⁵⁶⁶ Hazlitt, 'On the Conduct of Life; Or, Advice to a Schoolboy' *Complete Works* XVII, 93-4.

⁵⁶⁷ See *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 'Hazlitt, William (1811-1893)', by Margaret Lesser. <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/98381>> [Accessed 3 January 2017].

will be less likely to be humbled or put to the blush by the display of common sense or native talent, than the more ignorant, self-sufficient and pedantic among the learned.’⁵⁶⁸ Furthermore, the almost exclusive focus on Classical authors at grammar schools and the Universities had led to the neglect of native authors, and to what Hazlitt (despite his own reliance on Classical forms of rhetoric) saw as the inappropriate use of Roman rhetoric in British politics, and an over-dependence on Classical authors by contemporary writers. More seriously, learned and legalistic jargon, derived from the Classical languages, had become a weapon used by the authorities to confuse and subdue the populace.

Despite all these serious reservations, Hazlitt, whilst by no means a Classical scholar, retained a ‘romantic’ attachment to the Classics throughout his life, as a means of raising the mind above the vulgar and commonplace. Perhaps because of this attachment, and despite his later view that education should be made pleasurable, Hazlitt maintained a deep-seated, almost snobbish, opposition to ‘new-fangled’ education, in particular to anything connected with ‘useful’ knowledge. He was, indeed, sceptical about the benefits of any sort of State-funded mass education beyond the most elementary, either for individuals or for society. This scepticism is perhaps at odds with Hazlitt’s current image as a radical, progressive thinker, and indeed is closer to what is generally seen as the reactionary attitude to such Utilitarian education of Wordsworth, Southey and Coleridge.

Hazlitt’s scepticism arose, of course, from different motivations. Wordsworth, Southey and Coleridge, and later De Quincey, from their conservative viewpoints, feared that an ‘unsuitably’ educated working class would be easily radicalized, whereas Hazlitt feared that mass education would become a tool of oppression and

⁵⁶⁸ Hazlitt, ‘The Shyness of Scholars’, *Complete Works* XVII, 254-64 (p. 259).

would erode the common sense and ready wit of the uneducated. By consistently opposing *all* schemes of mass education, Hazlitt avoided the dilemma, in which Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey placed themselves, of having to decide what mode and level of education was appropriate for the lower classes. Hazlitt could, of course, be accused of unwittingly helping to leave the common people in ignorance by opposing any specific proposals to improve their education. In turn, once they had become disillusioned with Bell's Madras system, both Wordsworth and Coleridge came to share Hazlitt's long-standing distrust of 'systems of education' as a panacea for the nation's ills.

Chapter Five: De Quincey

In this chapter I look at De Quincey's education, in particular at Manchester Grammar School and Oxford University, and consider how his ideas on education were shaped by his experiences there. The chapter goes on to examine De Quincey's growing concerns about, firstly, the politically de-stabilising effects of mass education, and secondly, the possible degeneration of the English language arising from mass literacy. It outlines De Quincey's ideological opposition to State-provided or compulsory education, and the education of his own children.

De Quincey's early education

De Quincey's education was erratic and interrupted several times, partly through his own choice, partly through changes in family circumstances. In particular, De Quincey believed that the actions, however well-intentioned, of the four guardians appointed after his father's death to look after his interests, had often caused him to lose out financially. He cites as an example the sale of his father's

house and grounds for £1,500 when 'by waiting a few years, four times that sum might have been obtained with ease.'⁵⁶⁹

De Quincey's father was a successful West Indies merchant, who had retired from business and established himself as a landed gentleman in rural Lancashire. According to De Quincey, his father and his friends, relatively uneducated themselves, had a disproportionate respect for scholarly learning. As De Quincey put it, in words similar to those used by Hazlitt in such essays as 'The Ignorance of the Learned' (see Chapter four):

[T]he reverence they paid to learning, to scholastic erudition, I mean, was disproportionate and excessive. Not having had a college education themselves [they] looked up with too much admiration to those who had; ascribing to them [...] a superiority greatly beyond the fact, and not [...] discerning that too often the scholar had become dull and comatose over his books; whilst the activity of trade, and the strife of practical business, had sharpened their own judgments.⁵⁷⁰

Like Coleridge and Hazlitt, De Quincey was a solitary child with few friends. As he describes his childhood: 'I never played in my life [...] I had no companion but an elder brother; and he, being five years older [...] naturally enough disdained me. I, again, on the same principle, neglected my next brother.'⁵⁷¹ Moreover, as the family

⁵⁶⁹ De Quincey, 'Sketches of Life and Manners, from the Autobiography of an English Opium-Eater', *Works X, Articles from Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, 1834-8*, ed. by Alina Clej (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003), pp. 3-233 (p. 15).

⁵⁷⁰ De Quincey, 'Sketches of Life and Manners, from the Autobiography of an English Opium-Eater', pp. 9-10.

⁵⁷¹ De Quincey, 'Sketches of Life and Manners, from the Autobiography of an English Opium-Eater', p. 11.

home was in the countryside, with no near neighbours, De Quincey was 'left to myself; no creature had I to converse with, [...] I [became] a self-dialogist.'⁵⁷²

When De Quincey was seven, his father died and De Quincey's mother moved the family to Bath, where De Quincey was sent to the local Grammar School. By his own account, De Quincey was something of a child prodigy: 'At thirteen I wrote Greek with ease; and at fifteen my command of that language was so great, that I not only composed Greek verses in lyric metres, but could converse in Greek fluently.' One of the masters at Bath Grammar School, pointing out De Quincey to a stranger, remarked "'that boy could harangue an Athenian mob, better than you or I could address an English one.'"⁵⁷³ After his promising beginning, De Quincey was involved in an accident, resulting in a head injury. Once he had recovered, he expected to return to Bath Grammar School. Indeed, according to De Quincey, the headmaster and the father of a fellow pupil visited his mother to persuade her to return him to the school on the basis of his good performance there. This, however, had the opposite of the desired effect: '[I]t illustrates my mother's sincere moral severity, that she was shocked at my hearing compliments to my own merits, and was altogether disturbed at what doubtless these gentlemen expected to see received with maternal pride.'⁵⁷⁴ De Quincey was instead transferred to Wingfield (Winkfield) School in Wiltshire, a private school 'of which the recommendation lay in the

⁵⁷² De Quincey, 'Sketches of Life and Manners, from the Autobiography of an English Opium-Eater', p. 11.

⁵⁷³ De Quincey, 'Confessions of an English Opium-Eater (1821)', *Works II, Confessions of an English Opium-Eater 1821-1856*, ed. by Grevel Lindop (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2000), 1-86 (p. 14).

⁵⁷⁴ De Quincey, 'Sketches of Life and Manners, from the Autobiography of an English Opium-Eater', p. 17.

religious character of the master.’⁵⁷⁵ De Quincey regarded Wingfield as greatly inferior to Bath Grammar School, and described the headmaster as a ‘blockhead, who was in a perpetual panic, lest I should expose his ignorance.’⁵⁷⁶ De Quincey was at Wingfield for one year, and on leaving the school at the age of fifteen, was, following a short stay with relatives in Ireland, moved to Manchester Grammar School. The intention was that he would prepare for a scholarship to Brasenose College, Oxford, with which Manchester Grammar School had links. (The choice of Manchester Grammar School was probably made because De Quincey’s guardians lived in the area.)⁵⁷⁷

De Quincey’s first reaction to Manchester Grammar School was disappointment at its lack of decoration or ornament: ‘The school-room showed already in its ample proportions some hint of its pretensions as an endowed school [...]. [T]he dreary expanse of white-washed walls [...] were as bare as the walls of a poor-house or a lazaretto.’⁵⁷⁸ At Manchester, De Quincey was quickly identified as a gifted pupil and placed in the highest class in the school, and was also allowed his own study-bedroom in the headmaster’s house.⁵⁷⁹ De Quincey regarded this privacy as a mixed blessing. By nature an introverted and very private person, in retrospect he saw this separation from his schoolmates as encouraging the early solitary habits

⁵⁷⁵ De Quincey, ‘Sketches of Life and Manners, from the Autobiography of an English Opium-Eater’, p. 17.

⁵⁷⁶ De Quincey, ‘Confessions of an English Opium-Eater (1821)’, p. 14.

⁵⁷⁷ Grevel Lindop, *The Opium-Eater: A Life of Thomas De Quincey* (London: Weidenfield & Nicholson, 1993), p. 46.

⁵⁷⁸ De Quincey, ‘Confessions of an English Opium-Eater (1856)’, p. 120.

⁵⁷⁹ Lindop, p. 47.

which persisted throughout his life. De Quincey traced his wish for solitude to the deaths in early childhood of his two sisters, which he believed had given him a prematurely sombre outlook on life. It is worth noting, however, that his younger brother (Richard, nicknamed 'Pink') was also of solitary habits: 'from the time he had reached his eleventh birthday, he had begun already to withdraw himself from the society of all other boys - to fall into long fits of abstraction - and to throw himself upon his own resources in a way neither usual nor necessary.'⁵⁸⁰

The headmaster of Manchester Grammar School, unnamed in the 1821 edition of the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, is described by De Quincey as 'a sound, well-built scholar but [...] coarse, clumsy and inelegant.'⁵⁸¹ A slightly more sympathetic portrait is given of the headmaster, now named as Mr Lawson, in the 1856 edition of the *Confessions*. Lawson was, in De Quincey's words, a man 'for whom life was over, for its hopes and trials.' Lawson's disillusion with life had, according to De Quincey, two sources. Firstly Lawson 'had been obliged to witness the final prostration of his [the Whig] political party' and secondly, 'he had been jilted and with circumstances (so I have heard) of cruel scorn.'⁵⁸² Notwithstanding these drawbacks, De Quincey concluded that the school was, on the whole, 'honourable both to the masters and to the upper boys'.⁵⁸³

⁵⁸⁰ De Quincey, 'Sketches of Life and Manners, from the Autobiography of an English Opium-Eater', p. 215.

⁵⁸¹ De Quincey, 'Confessions of an English Opium-Eater (1821)', p. 14.

⁵⁸² De Quincey, 'Confessions of an English Opium-Eater (1856)', pp. 122-23.

⁵⁸³ De Quincey, 'Sketches of Life and Manners, from the Autobiography of an English Opium-Eater', p. 124.

De Quincey was particularly impressed by the fact that ‘*all* punishments, that appealed to any sense of bodily pain, had fallen into disuse [...] long before any public agitation had begun to stir in that direction.’ How, then, he asked rhetorically, was discipline maintained? He responded that it ‘was maintained through the self-discipline of the senior boys, and through the efficacy of their examples.’⁵⁸⁴ The senior boys were all lodged in the headmaster’s house, and were thus ‘bound together by the links of brotherhood’, unlike the day-scholars who were ‘disconnected’ from the school and each other. De Quincey also believed that the lack of a playground in the upper school, although a defect in some ways, reinforced the senior boys’ authority; had they played with the younger boys, ‘indiscriminate familiarity would have followed as an uncontrollable result.’⁵⁸⁵ As discussed below, De Quincey believed that any system of education would have a better chance of success with boarding pupils than with day-scholars, because the latter would have, in their parents, a competing authority to that of the school.

De Quincey was impressed by his schoolmates’ knowledge of both Classical and English literature, and also by their personal qualities. He overcame his innate snobbery to conclude that although ‘the parents of many boys were artisans, or of that rank [and] some even had sisters that were menial servants’, the boys, almost without exception Lancastrians like himself, had ‘the pre-eminence as regards energy, power to face suffering, and other high qualities.’⁵⁸⁶ For a time, he was happy

⁵⁸⁴ De Quincey, ‘Sketches of Life and Manners, from the Autobiography of an English Opium-Eater’, pp. 124-25.

⁵⁸⁵ De Quincey, ‘Confessions of an English Opium-Eater (1856)’, p. 129.

⁵⁸⁶ De Quincey, ‘Sketches of Life and Manners, from the Autobiography of an English Opium-Eater’, p. 129.

at the school. After he had been there for eighteen months, however, two factors caused De Quincey to wish to leave. Firstly, revisions to the school's timetable meant that he was unable to take the exercise he believed was necessary for his health and, secondly, a misdiagnosed liver illness resulted, in his own words, in 'profound melancholy.'⁵⁸⁷ The medicine prescribed by an ignorant doctor made his condition deteriorate, until De Quincey felt 'absolute despair.'⁵⁸⁸

De Quincey had for some time been asking his main guardian for permission to leave Manchester Grammar School and go up to Oxford a year early, but when his guardian refused, De Quincey left the school (in his own words, 'absconded') and walked to his mother's house in Chester. He then travelled to London and broke off all contact with his family and guardians, intending to remain separated from them until he came of age and could claim his inheritance.

De Quincey at Oxford

Leaving Manchester Grammar School when he did had several adverse consequences for De Quincey, and, with hindsight, he regarded his decision to leave as the 'fatal error' of his life.⁵⁸⁹ In purely financial terms, by leaving the school early, De Quincey forfeited £50 a year for up to seven years, which Manchester Grammar School paid to ex-pupils who went on to Brasenose College. To make matters worse, his annual allowance of £150 was subsequently reduced to £100 because of his mother's financial difficulties, meaning that De Quincey had only £100 a year to

⁵⁸⁷ De Quincey, 'Sketches of Life and Manners, from the Autobiography of an English Opium-Eater', p. 140.

⁵⁸⁸ De Quincey, 'Sketches of Life and Manners, from the Autobiography of an English Opium-Eater', p. 141.

⁵⁸⁹ De Quincey, 'Confessions of an English Opium-Eater (1856)', p. 138.

cover all his expenses whilst at Oxford. In *Suspiria de Profundis* (1845) De Quincey claims that his guardians had offered to make him an allowance of £200 a year whilst he was a student, but only on the condition that he studied for 'a positive and definite [...] profession.' De Quincey states that he refused on principle to accept such a condition even though he knew that 'no law existed, nor could any obligation be created [...] by which I could be compelled into keeping my engagement.'⁵⁹⁰ De Quincey wanted to 'bear my future course untrammelled by promises that I might repent.'⁵⁹¹ As discussed in Chapter two, Wordsworth had also wished to study at Cambridge without being constrained by a definite choice of career, and effectively followed his own interests in the subjects he studied, though he never corrected the implicit understanding of his relatives that he would become a clergyman upon graduating.

After failing to obtain a place at Christ Church, De Quincey entered Worcester College, Oxford, in 1803 as a 'commoner' and read widely, though, as had Wordsworth, in a 'desultory' and unfocused fashion. As Lindop points out, Worcester College, 'far from being the grandest of Oxford colleges', had a reputation for lax discipline and was also one of the few at Oxford which allowed its students to reside outside the city for the majority of the academic year, requiring them to attend for only thirteen weeks a year. It also charged the lowest rate of 'caution money' (a deposit paid in advance by students against future fines and unpaid bills). De

⁵⁹⁰ De Quincey, 'Suspiria de Profundis', *Works XV, Articles from Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, and Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, 1844-6*, ed. by Grevel Lindop (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003), 126-204 (p. 195).

⁵⁹¹ De Quincey, 'Suspiria de Profundis', p. 195.

Quincey, possibly for reasons of economy, spent most of his time after his first year at the University in the village of Littlemore.⁵⁹²

Whilst at Oxford, De Quincey was struck by the ignorance of his fellow students about English literature:

At Oxford, pupils from most schools left a painful memento of failure; [...] of *wilful* and *intentional* disregard [...] in relation to *modern* literature [...] and [...] a special neglect of our own English literature. To myself, whose homage ascended night and day towards the altars of English Poetry or Eloquence, it was shocking and revolting to find in high-minded young countrymen, burning with sensibility that sought vainly for a corresponding object and deep unconsciousness of an all-sufficient object– namely that great inheritance of our literature.⁵⁹³

To address this failing, De Quincey urged the teaching of English literature in schools, suggesting that selections ‘from Milton, from Dryden, from Pope and many other writers [...] would not generally transcend the intelligence of a boy of sixteen or seventeen years of age.’⁵⁹⁴

De Quincey’s lack of funds whilst at Oxford meant that he was unwilling to take part in social activities, as he would not have been able to reciprocate others’ hospitality, and this, together with his solitary habits and choice of residence away from the city, reinforced his isolation from his fellow students. In De Quincey’s words: ‘for the first two years of my residence in Oxford, I compute that I did not

⁵⁹² Lindop, pp. 109-11. Littlemore is about four miles from Oxford.

⁵⁹³ De Quincey, ‘Confessions of an English Opium-Eater (1856), pp. 132-33.

⁵⁹⁴ De Quincey, ‘Confessions of an English Opium-Eater (1856), p. 134.

utter one hundred words', whilst his first, and also his last, conversation with his tutor 'consisted of three sentences, two of which fell to his share, one to mine.'⁵⁹⁵ Despite having done very well in the first part of his final examinations, De Quincey suddenly left Oxford in May 1808 and made his way back to London. The precise reasons for this decision are unclear; Lindop speculates that De Quincey may have suffered some form of nervous breakdown, brought on by excessive use of opium.⁵⁹⁶ Robert Morrison and Frances Wilson both suggest that De Quincey was disconcerted by a last-minute change in the format of the viva voce examination; he had expected to be both questioned, and to answer, in Greek, but he was informed just before the examination that he would be questioned in Greek, but would be required to reply in English. This, according to Wilson, made the examiners 'contemptible' in De Quincey's eyes.⁵⁹⁷ De Quincey's name remained on Worcester College's books until December 1810, up to which date he could have submitted himself for re-examination, but in the event he never returned to Oxford.

De Quincey's own experiences at Oxford had in many ways been unsatisfactory; indeed he states in his *Autobiographical Sketches* that he 'owes the University nothing'.⁵⁹⁸ De Quincey nevertheless defended the University against the attacks of reformers who claimed that the teaching provided was of a poor standard, that the Professorships were essentially sinecures, and that the students were

⁵⁹⁵ De Quincey, 'Sketches of Life and Manners, from the Autobiography of an English Opium-Eater', p. 147.

⁵⁹⁶ Lindop, p. 160.

⁵⁹⁷ Morrison, pp. 133-34; Wilson, p. 157.

⁵⁹⁸ De Quincey, 'Sketches of Life and Manners, from the Autobiography of an English Opium-Eater', p. 109.

uncontrollable and drank to excess.⁵⁹⁹ He was particularly critical of comparisons between Oxford and the Scottish universities, pointing out that in the latter, many students were as young as fourteen and thus still children, whereas the vast majority of Oxford students were at least eighteen and were mostly resident in the University for their first year of study. De Quincey claimed that during his time at Oxford he knew of only one student who was younger than eighteen.⁶⁰⁰

'Education: Instruction of Boys'

A useful insight into De Quincey's early ideas about education is provided by his lengthy, mostly favourable, two-part review of Matthew Davenport Hill's book *Plans for the Government and Liberal Instruction of Boys, in Large Numbers, Drawn From Experience* (1822). Hill's book is based on his experiences at the Hazelwood School, Birmingham, which had been established by his father, Thomas Wright Hill, at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Hill's Preface states that the purpose of his book is to follow the example set by the Edgeworths, by accurately recording the results of an experiment in education.⁶⁰¹ De Quincey describes Hill's book as 'the work of a very ingenious man, [which] records the most original experiment in Education which in this country at least has been attempted since [...] those

⁵⁹⁹ De Quincey, 'Sketches of Life and Manners, from the Autobiography of an English Opium-Eater', p. 109.

⁶⁰⁰ De Quincey, 'Sketches of Life and Manners, from the Autobiography of an English Opium-Eater', p. 133.

⁶⁰¹ Matthew Davenport Hill, *Plans for the Government and Liberal Instruction of Boys, in Large Numbers, Drawn From Experience* (London: G. and W. B. Whittaker, 1822), p. viii. Hill went on to become Recorder for the city of Birmingham, and a campaigner for prison reform.

communicated by the Edgeworths.’⁶⁰² In the review De Quincey defends the Madras system against claims that, firstly, it was only suitable for the education of the poor ([‘it] has been adopted in some of the great classical schools of the kingdom’), and that secondly, the system damaged the ‘freedom of the human intellect’ by mechanising the process of learning (as both Coleridge and Wordsworth eventually came to believe). De Quincey held that, because it ‘works itself’, Bell’s system was able to ‘neutralize and set at defiance all difference of ability in the teachers – which previously determined the success of [a] school.’⁶⁰³ As discussed above, De Quincey believed that the generally effective systems in operation at Manchester Grammar School, which also devolved much of the running of the school to the senior boys, had been to some extent undermined by the character of the headmaster.

However, De Quincey sees Hill’s system as going much further than Bell’s. Not only is Hill’s system, like Bell’s, ‘laudably solicitous for the fullest and most accurate communication of knowledge’, it ‘contemplates the whole man with a reference to his total means of usefulness and happiness in life.’⁶⁰⁴ De Quincey argued that for such a ‘whole man’ system to be fully effective ‘the whole child should be surrendered to the school; ie [...] there should be no day-scholars.’ Otherwise, he believed, the authority of the school would always be open to challenge by the rival authority of a child’s parents.⁶⁰⁵

⁶⁰² De Quincey, ‘Education: Instruction of Boys’ *Works IV, Articles and translations from the London Magazine; Walladmor, 1824-1825*, ed. by Frederick Burwick (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2000), pp. 120-148 (p. 121).

⁶⁰³ De Quincey, ‘Education: Instruction of Boys’, p. 122n.

⁶⁰⁴ De Quincey, ‘Education: Instruction of Boys’, p. 122.

⁶⁰⁵ De Quincey, ‘Education: Instruction of Boys’, p. 122.

Hill's system, like Bell's, devolved discipline to the boys, and, in Hill's words, the only punishments imposed were 'fines and imprisonment. [presumably the latter refers to detention]. Impositions, public disgrace, and corporeal pain, have been for some years discarded among us.'⁶⁰⁶ De Quincey would have approved of such a system of discipline, as he had seen a similar system working well at Manchester Grammar School. De Quincey also had specific personal reasons for disapproving of corporal punishment in schools, and his attitude towards it provides an interesting contrast to the relatively relaxed attitude of Coleridge (see Chapter three). De Quincey's younger brother, nicknamed 'Pink', was at first taught by a clergyman in 'a very sequestered parsonage in a northern county'. This suited his brother very well; as the clergyman was 'learned, quiet, absorbed in his studies [...] treating my brother in all points as a companion: whilst, on the other hand, my brother was not the person to forget the respect due to [...] a clergyman, a scholar, and his own preceptor.' Unfortunately, his guardians for some reason moved him from the parsonage and placed him in a school under the care of an 'active, bustling man of the world', who thought that 'physical coercion was the sole engine by which man could be managed', and who accordingly 'beat – beat brutally – kicked, trampled upon' his pupils. 'Sometimes he would deliberately speak unclearly to the timid, sensitive boy whom he intended to set a charge of disobedience. "Sir, if you please, what was it that you said?" "What was it that I said? What! playing upon my words? [...] Strip, sir; strip this instant".'⁶⁰⁷ De Quincey's brother ran away twice; on the first

⁶⁰⁶ Matthew Davenport Hill, *Plans for the Government and Liberal Instruction of Boys, in Large Numbers, Drawn From Experience*, quoted in De Quincey, 'Education: Instruction of Boys', p. 126.

⁶⁰⁷ De Quincey, 'Sketches of Life and Manners, from the Autobiography of an English Opium-Eater', pp. 217-18. The description of the brutal schoolmaster is reminiscent

occasion he was quickly found and returned to the school, where ‘the grim tyrant [...] repeated his brutalities more fiercely than before – now acting in the double spirit of tyranny and revenge.’⁶⁰⁸ On the second occasion, Pink made his way to the docks at Liverpool, and signed up as a member of the crew of a merchant vessel. He was then captured by pirates, held prisoner for a number of years, and eventually made his way back to England.⁶⁰⁹

Hill’s system, like Bell’s, was intended to operate as self-government by the pupils. In Hill’s words, ‘The principle of our government is to leave, as much as possible, all power in the hands of the boys themselves: To this end we permit them to elect a committee, which enacts all the laws of the school, subject however to the *veto* of the head master.’⁶¹⁰ Hill’s school had what amounted to a system of courts to try penal and civil offences, with judicial officers, a judge and jury, and appeal courts for disputed verdicts. De Quincey approves of Hill’s methods of discipline, not only because they saved masters from ‘a grievous waste of time in administering justice’, but because the boys obtained valuable moral and intellectual experience in hearing and judging cases: ‘forensic ability is thus cherished; [...] the logical facility of abstracting the essential from the accidental is involved in the summing up of the

of Coleridge’s descriptions of James Boyer, the headmaster of Christ’s Hospital School (see Chapter three). In this article De Quincey mentions in passing Rowland Hill, the younger brother of Matthew Hill, who, inspired by his brother’s example, established three schools run on ‘progressive’ lines in Birmingham and London.

⁶⁰⁸ De Quincey, ‘Sketches of Life and Manners, from the Autobiography of an English Opium-Eater’, p. 220.

⁶⁰⁹ Lindop, p. 182. ‘Pink’ went away to sea again in the 1820s and disappeared in a forest on Haiti after becoming separated from his shipmates; *ibid* p. 276.

⁶¹⁰ Matthew Davenport Hill, *Plans for the Government and Liberal Instruction of Boys, in Large Numbers, Drawn From Experience*, p. 1.

judge; in the pleadings for and against are involved the rhetorical arts of narrating facts perspicuously [...] to say nothing of elocution and the arts of style and diction.’⁶¹¹

Hill’s system sought to address what Coleridge had identified as two of the main failings with his education at Christ’s Hospital, as described in Chapter three; firstly, the favouritism or antagonism of teachers towards certain pupils, and secondly, the amount of wasted time between lessons and play, which led to boredom and thus to bad behaviour. Regarding the latter, in Hill’s words: ‘The middle state between work and play is extremely unfavourable to the habits of the pupil; we have succeeded, by great attention to order and regularity, in reducing it almost to nothing.’⁶¹²

De Quincey examines how Hill’s system, having eliminated this wasted time, encourages pupils to make the best use of their time. He quotes with approval Hill’s words that ‘if it were possible for the pupil to acquire a love of knowledge [...] he would have done more towards insuring a stock of knowledge [...] than if he had been the recipient of as much learning as ever was infused into the passive school boy.’⁶¹³ De Quincey adds that ‘we are further of opinion that [...] every system of tuition in proportion as it approaches to a good one will inevitably involve the

⁶¹¹ De Quincey, ‘Education: Instruction of Boys’, p. 130.

⁶¹² Matthew Davenport Hill, *Plans for the Government and Liberal Instruction of Boys, in Large Numbers, Drawn From Experience*, p. 1.

⁶¹³ Matthew Davenport Hill, *Plans for the Government and Liberal Instruction of Boys, in Large Numbers, Drawn From Experience*, quoted in De Quincey, ‘Education: Instruction of Boys’, p. 132.

generation of this love of knowledge concurrently with the generation of knowledge itself.’⁶¹⁴ De Quincey contrasts this positive approach towards knowledge with:

[M]elancholy [...] cases [...] of good faculties wholly lost to their possessor and an incurable disgust for literature and knowledge founded [...] solely on the stupidity and false methods of the teacher, who [...] was incapable of connecting one spark of pleasurable feeling with any science.⁶¹⁵

How, De Quincey asks, is such a love of knowledge to be created? According to Hill, by ‘combining the most obvious *utility* with [...] the exercises of the intellect; [...] by matching the difficulties of the learner exactly with his abilities; [...] by connecting with the learner’s progress the sense of continual success’, and, finally, ‘by communicating clear, vivid and accurate conceptions.’⁶¹⁶ This matching of teaching to each individual pupil’s ability was also a key feature of Bell’s system.

De Quincey recalls from his own childhood how ‘at eight years of age, though even then passionately fond of study’ he had ‘passed some of the most wretched and ungenial days of our life in “learning by *heart*” as it is called’ Latin phrases supposedly illustrating grammatical rules, ‘and to this hour their accursed barbarisms cling to our memory as ineradicably as the golden lines of Aeschylus or Shakspeare [sic].’ Not only was the task itself irksome, but ‘this loathsome heap of rubbish thus deposited in the memory’ was of no practical use, because the examples learned could not encompass all possible grammatical variations. In De Quincey’s opinion, ‘daily experience of books, actual intercourse with Latin authors, is

⁶¹⁴ De Quincey, ‘Education: Instruction of Boys’, p. 132.

⁶¹⁵ De Quincey, ‘Education: Instruction of Boys’, p. 132.

⁶¹⁶ De Quincey, ‘Education: Instruction of Boys’, p. 132.

sufficient to teach all the irregularities of that language: just as the daily experience of an English child leads him without trouble into all the anomalies of his own language.’⁶¹⁷ This, of course, was hardly an original insight; as described in Chapter one, Montaigne was taught Latin through conversations with his tutor in that language.

As noted above, Hill’s system did away with all forms of corporal punishment. Hill also abolished all punishments that would ‘destroy self-respect. [...] Expulsion even has been resorted to, rather than that a boy should be submitted to treatment that might lead him and his school-fellows to forget that he was a gentleman.’⁶¹⁸ De Quincey reminds his readers that it was Coleridge’s objection to ‘shaming’ punishments in particular which led to his attacks on Lancaster’s monitorial system in his lectures on education, and his preference for Bell’s system. In De Quincey’s words, Lancaster’s system differed from Bell’s ‘chiefly in the complexity of the details, and by pressing so cruelly in its punishments upon the principle of shame.’⁶¹⁹

Noticing that Hill’s book contained a comparison of private and public education, De Quincey comments that, whilst ‘the question is very sensibly discussed [...] it is useless to discuss any question like this, which is a difficult problem only because it is an unlimited problem.’ The choice between public and private education could only be considered in the context of a particular child’s requirements, and the means of the individual parent. In De Quincey’s view, as far as the acquirement of knowledge is concerned ‘it is always possible to secure a good

⁶¹⁷ De Quincey, ‘Education: Instruction of Boys’, p. 133.

⁶¹⁸ Matthew Davenport Hill, *Plans for the Government and Liberal Instruction of Boys, in Large Numbers, Drawn From Experience*, p. 2.

⁶¹⁹ De Quincey, ‘Education: Instruction of Boys’, p. 141.

public education, and not always possible to acquire a good private one' whilst, for many destinations in future life, 'a public education [is] much more eligible than for others.'⁶²⁰

De Quincey's verdict on Hill's system is almost wholly favourable: 'In the hands of its founder we are convinced that it is calculated to work wonders [and] we should confide a child to his care with [...] perfect confidence', but he wonders whether the system, however good in Hill's hands 'is [...] adapted for general diffusion?' He concludes that whilst Hill is a 'very original thinker on the science of education', his system, unlike Bell's, is not independent enough of the teacher's ability to guarantee its success in all cases. De Quincey ends the review by recommending to Hill the work of German educationalists, as the subject of education has been 'much cultivated in Germany: "Paedagogic" journals, even, have been published periodically, like literary or philosophical journals [...] not without very considerable success.'⁶²¹ It is worth noting that De Quincey does not share the concerns about foreign writers on education of earlier conservative writers such as Hannah More and Sarah Trimmer.

'Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected'

De Quincey's most considered writings on education are contained in a series of five articles collectively entitled 'Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected', published in the *London Magazine* from January to July 1823.⁶²² The

⁶²⁰ De Quincey, 'Education: Instruction of Boys', p. 142.

⁶²¹ De Quincey, 'Education: Instruction of Boys', pp. 145-47. De Quincey does not identify any specific journals, and the only German reformer he names is Johann Basedow (1723-90) who, in De Quincey's words: 'naturalized Rousseau in Germany'.

⁶²² De Quincey, 'Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected', *Works: III, Articles and translations from the London Magazine, Blackwood's Magazine*

'Letters' indirectly echo Wordsworth's 'Reply to Mathetes', published in Coleridge's *The Friend* in 1809-10 (see Chapter three).⁶²³ De Quincey's Letters are supposedly written in response to a request for advice from 'a young man of talent' whose education has been neglected, whilst Wordsworth was advising a young man 'bred up under our unfavourable System of Education'. The 'Letters' are also, as Frederick Burwick points out in his Introduction, a direct response to Coleridge's advice in *Biographia Literaria* that one should 'never pursue literature as a career', De Quincey countering in detail several of Coleridge's objections.⁶²⁴

The 'young man' to whom the Letters are addressed was an acquaintance of De Quincey's, aged thirty-two, who believed that he had been 'defrauded of the education to which even [his] earliest and humblest efforts had entitled [him]', and whose own 'heroic efforts' had not been sufficient to repair 'that greatest of losses.'⁶²⁵ The young man had asked for De Quincey's advice on two specific questions; firstly, whether he should take up residence at either of the two English universities, or at a foreign university; secondly, for De Quincey's opinion of Coleridge's advice in *Biographia Literaria* that the 'trade of authorship' should always be regarded as a secondary occupation.⁶²⁶ On the first question, De Quincey's advice is unequivocal:

and others 1821-1824, ed. by Frederick Burwick (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2000), pp. 39-97.

⁶²³ One of the two joint authors of the letter from 'Mathetes' was Christopher North, an Oxford contemporary of De Quincey.

⁶²⁴ De Quincey, 'Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected', p. 40.

⁶²⁵ De Quincey, 'Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected', p. 41.

⁶²⁶ De Quincey, 'Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected', pp. 41-42.

The majority of the under-graduates [...] will be your juniors by twelve or fourteen years; a disparity of age which could not but make your society mutually burthensome. What then is it, that you would seek in a university? Lectures? These [...] are surely the very worst mode of acquiring any sort of accurate knowledge [...]. But besides this, university lectures are naturally adapted not so much to the general purpose of communicating knowledge, as to the specific purpose of meeting a particular form of examination for degrees, and a particular profession.⁶²⁷

De Quincey suggests that the only potential advantages that lectures have over books are ‘a better apparatus for displaying illustrative experiments’, and ‘a rhetorical delivery [...] (as in lectures on poetry, &c.).’ Even these advantages, however, are ‘more easily commanded in a great capital than in the most splendid university.’⁶²⁸ The value of access to university libraries can be exaggerated: ‘to the greatest of them under-graduates have not free access: to the inferior ones (of their own college, &c.) the libraries of the great capitals are often equal or superior: and for the purpose of mere study, your own private library is far preferable to the Bodleian or the Vatican.’ De Quincey concludes that the only advantage of a university education to the young man would be if he wished to adopt a particular profession, for which a degree would be either useful or indispensable.⁶²⁹

⁶²⁷ De Quincey, ‘Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected’, p. 41.

⁶²⁸ De Quincey, ‘Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected’, pp. 41-42.

⁶²⁹ De Quincey, ‘Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected’, p. 42.

De Quincey then examines at some length Coleridge's view that literature should only ever be a 'subordinate pursuit'. De Quincey argues that Coleridge is actually considering two distinct objections to literature 'as the principal pursuit of life.' The first is to literature considered 'as a means of livelihood', and here De Quincey agrees that 'the evils anticipated by Mr Coleridge are of a high and positive character, and such as tend directly to degrade the character, and indirectly to aggravate some heavy domestic evils.'⁶³⁰ The second is to literature 'considered as the means of sufficiently occupying and exercising the intellect', and here De Quincey claims that, whilst it is true that literature alone is not sufficient, there is an alternative approach possible to that advocated by Coleridge, which he will explain in subsequent Letters. Although, De Quincey states, 'it is a vain thing for any man to hope that he can arrive at my age without many troubles', setting aside particular sorrows, 'the great account of my days [...] would produce a great overbalance of happiness; and of happiness, during those years in which I lived in solitude, of necessity derived exclusively from intellectual sources.'⁶³¹

De Quincey goes on to contrast the approaches to study of Leibnitz, whose reading was 'discursive', and who was always 'cheerful and obliging', and an unnamed Englishman, whose reading was 'desultory', and who was 'continually in ill-humour, distempered and untuned with charitable feelings; directing too harsh and acrimonious a spirit of criticism always against the age in which he lives, sometimes

⁶³⁰ De Quincey, 'Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected', p. 43. There is considerable irony here, given De Quincey's subsequent financial difficulties when working as a professional writer.

⁶³¹ De Quincey, 'Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected', pp. 44-45. De Quincey was thirty-eight when he wrote the Letters.

even against individuals.’⁶³² De Quincey suggests that the difference between the two was essentially that whilst Leibnitz was ‘generously just to the claims of others; uncensorious, and yet patient of censure; willing to teach, and most willing to be taught’, the Englishman was ‘querulous under criticism, almost to the extent of believing himself the object of conspiracies and persecution.’ De Quincey ascribes the difference to the Englishman’s ‘unfortunate plan of study’, which had ‘too often left him with no subjects for intellectual exertion.’⁶³³

In the second Letter, De Quincey sets out the basic elements of his plan for self-education, which consist of ‘first *Logic*; secondly, *Languages*; thirdly, *Arts of Memory*.’⁶³⁴ De Quincey promises to develop these further in three future Letters, and to then ‘unfold[...] the course of study.’⁶³⁵ In words that anticipate the arguments of John Stuart Mill (see Chapter six), De Quincey emphasises that what is of paramount importance is knowing *how* to think, as opposed to knowing *about* particular subjects, which is of secondary importance. He dismisses almost all previous educational theorists, including Locke, because he regards them as having missed this fundamental point: ‘I venture to denounce, as unprofitable, the whole class of books written on the model of Locke’s *Conduct of the Understanding*.’ De Quincey condemns Locke’s book, and those modelled on it, as ‘aphoristic; and, as

⁶³² De Quincey, ‘Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected’, p. 45.

⁶³³ De Quincey, ‘Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected’, p. 46. De Quincey strongly hints, but does not state, that the Englishman in question is Coleridge, although the description could equally fit Hazlitt, or indeed, De Quincey himself, whose own reading at Oxford had been ‘desultory’.

⁶³⁴ De Quincey, ‘Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected’, p. 51.

⁶³⁵ De Quincey, ‘Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected’, p. 51.

might be expected from that method, without a plan; and, which is partly the cause and partly the consequence of having no plan, without a foundation.’⁶³⁶

De Quincey goes on to describe what he sees as the necessary ‘foundation’ which most writings on education lack: ‘the corner-stone of strong-built knowledge, viz, on logic; on a proper choice of languages; on a particular part of what is called metaphysics; and on mathematics.’ Of the latter subject, De Quincey argues that mathematicians have exaggerated the amount of intelligence necessary to master the subject: ‘from the entire absence of all those acts of mind which do really imply profundity of intellect, it is a question whether an idiot might not be made an excellent mathematician. [...] [M]athematics are very easy and very important.’⁶³⁷ De Quincey recommends that the young man begin by studying Euclid, and suggests that ‘by reading for two hours a-day, you will easily accomplish in about thirteen weeks’ the ‘eight books of the Elements which are usually read, and the Data.’⁶³⁸ As discussed in Chapter six, John Stuart Mill was equally dismissive of the alleged difficulty of mathematics as an academic subject.

De Quincey’s third Letter is devoted to languages; in particular, to identifying the languages most necessary to enable the young man to access ‘the largest body of literature [...] at the least possible price of time and mental energy.’ As with

⁶³⁶ De Quincey, ‘Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected’, pp. 56-57. The work of Locke which De Quincey criticizes is the philosophical *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) rather than the more practical *Some Thoughts on Education* (1693). The latter book, discussed in Chapter one, contains several ideas, for instance on the best method of teaching Classical languages and the avoidance of corporal punishment, with which De Quincey would almost certainly have concurred.

⁶³⁷ De Quincey, ‘Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected’, p. 57.

⁶³⁸ De Quincey, ‘Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected’, pp. 57-58.

mathematics, De Quincey suggests that the study of languages per se is of limited intellectual value:

The act of learning a science is good, not only for the knowledge which results, but for the exercise which attends it: the energies which the learner is obliged to put forth, are true intellectual energies: and his very errors are full of instruction. [...] But in the study of languages [...] nothing of all this can take place, and for one simple reason - that all is arbitrary.⁶³⁹

De Quincey suggests that the current over-emphasis on the study of languages was 'a national fashion', pointing out that even in the 'humblest schools, in which however low the price of tuition, &c. is fixed, French never fails to enter as a principle [sic] branch of the course of study.'⁶⁴⁰ This echoes the concerns of earlier conservative writers, such as Hannah More, that too much time was wasted on teaching 'accomplishments', such as foreign languages, which were unlikely to be of any practical use.

De Quincey then enters into a long digression, contrasting the huge numbers of books in print with the limited time which an individual can devote to studying them: 'From the age of twenty to eighty [...] the utmost [a man] could hope to travel through would be twenty thousand volumes; a number not, perhaps, above 5 *per cent* of what the mere *current* literature of Europe would accumulate in that period of years.'⁶⁴¹ De Quincey scathingly criticizes German writers, such as Bouterwerk

⁶³⁹ De Quincey, 'Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected', p. 61.

⁶⁴⁰ De Quincey, 'Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected', p. 62&n. De Quincey was consistently dismissive of the French as a nation, in contrast to Hazlitt's equally consistent admiration.

⁶⁴¹ De Quincey, 'Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected', p. 64.

and Schlegel, who had produced histories of literature. Of the former's plan De Quincey writes: 'Conceive, if you can, the monstrous and insane pretensions involved in such a scheme. At the outset he had five languages to learn besides the dialects of his own; [...] the mere printed books [...] in any one of these languages [...] would have found full employment for twelve able-bodied men through an entire life.'⁶⁴² Schlegel's plan was even more ambitious, adding Oriental, Scandinavian and Provençal literature 'and, for ought I know, a billion of things beside: to say nothing of an active share in the current literature, as Reviewer, Magazinish, and author.' Knowing how much effort is required to gain a proper understanding of only a few authors, such as Milton, Shakespeare and Euripides, should, De Quincey suggests, convince us that the claims of Bouterwek and Schlegel are 'a monstrous fiction.' Moreover, he suggests that a person is deluded who believes that 'it is *reading* to cram himself with words, the bare sense of which he can hardly have time to glance, like the lamps of a mail coach, upon his hurried and bewildered understanding.'⁶⁴³

De Quincey advises the young man to follow the advice of Thomas James Mathias in *The Pursuits of Literature* (1794-7), to '*dare* to be ignorant of many things.'⁶⁴⁴ A good scheme of study would 'exclude as powerfully as it will appropriate', and thus enable the young man to 'forsake popular paths of knowledge [...] that [...] are not favourable to the ultimate ends of knowledge.'⁶⁴⁵ De Quincey

⁶⁴² De Quincey, 'Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected', pp. 66-67.

⁶⁴³ De Quincey, 'Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected', p. 67.

⁶⁴⁴ *The Pursuits of Literature* was a lengthy poem satirizing Matthias's literary contemporaries. It went through sixteen editions.

⁶⁴⁵ De Quincey, 'Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected', p. 69.

argues that, in choosing which particular literature is most worthy of study, the young man should ignore the usual contrast that is made between books of knowledge and books of pleasure. The true antithesis to knowledge, he claims, is 'not *pleasure* but *power*. All, that is literature, seeks to communicate power; all, that is not literature, to communicate knowledge.' De Quincey claimed to have evolved the concept of 'the literature of power' during the course of 'many years' of conversation with Wordsworth.⁶⁴⁶ De Quincey gives *King Lear* as an example of such 'power': 'When in *King Lear*, the height, and depth, and breadth of human passion is revealed to us [...] when I am thus startled into a feeling of the infinity of the world within me, is this power? Or what may I call it?'⁶⁴⁷

Given this contrast between the literature of knowledge and the literature of power, De Quincey claims that the study of Classical literature must be on the basis of its power, since the knowledge it contains has been adequately translated, whilst the power of Greek literature is of a different 'genus' to that of modern or Christian literature: 'the antique being the other hemisphere, as it were, which, with our own, or Christian hemisphere, composes the entire sphere of human intellectual energy.'⁶⁴⁸ Latin literature serves an entirely different purpose; having been 'the universal language of Christendom for so long a period' and there being 'no hope

⁶⁴⁶ De Quincey, 'Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected', p. 70 &n.

⁶⁴⁷ De Quincey, 'Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected', pp. 70-71.

⁶⁴⁸ De Quincey, 'Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected', pp. 72-73.

that the immense bibliotheca of Latin accumulated in the last three centuries will ever be translated [...] you cannot possibly dispense with [it].'⁶⁴⁹

De Quincey elaborates on the distinction between the literature of knowledge and the literature of power in a review of William Roscoe's 1847 edition of Alexander Pope's poems, and encapsulates the dichotomy between 'useful' knowledge and 'pure' learning that lay at the heart of the debate about education during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. De Quincey asks the reader what can be learned from *Paradise Lost*, compared to what can be learned from, for example, a cookery book. He concludes that the former does not actually teach us anything, whilst from the latter, in every paragraph you learn something you did not know before. 'What you owe to Milton is not any knowledge; [...] what you owe - is *power*, that is, exercise and expansion to your own latent capacity of sympathy with the infinite.'⁶⁵⁰

De Quincey goes on to argue that: 'Tragedy, romance, fairy-tales, epopee [epic poems] alike restore to man's mind the ideals of justice, of hope, of truth, of mercy, of retribution [...]. It is certain that, were it not for the literature of power, these ideals would often remain amongst us as mere arid notional forms.'⁶⁵¹ This looks back to the claims made for imaginative writing made by Samuel Johnson, Wordsworth and Coleridge, and forward to John Henry Newman's ideas about the 'humanizing' effects

⁶⁴⁹ De Quincey, 'Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected', pp. 73-74.

⁶⁵⁰ De Quincey, 'The Poetry of Pope', *Works XVI, Articles from Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, MacPhail's Edinburgh Ecclesiastical Journal, the Glasgow Athenaeum Album, the North British Review, and Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine 1847-9*, ed. by Robert Morrison (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003), pp. 332-364 (p. 337).

⁶⁵¹ De Quincey, 'The Poetry of Pope', p. 337.

of literature as set out in *The Idea of a University* (1852). It also echoes the claims for literature made by John Stuart Mill a decade or so previously (see Chapter six).

In his fourth Letter, De Quincey considers the competing claims of modern European languages, and concludes that, apart from English, the only languages that need to be considered for a scholar are French and German. He quickly dismisses the Slavonic and Celtic languages: 'No Celt even, however extravagant, pretends to the possession of a body of Celtic philosophy, and Celtic science of independent growth.'⁶⁵² He then argues that the Italian, Spanish and Portuguese languages can be ignored because 'these three nations have but feebly participated in the general scientific and philosophic labours of the age.'⁶⁵³ Whilst conceding that French literature has certain advantages over English literature, De Quincey concludes that German has stronger claims over either; 'the most conspicuous advantage of the German literature is its great originality and boldness of speculation, and the character of masculine austerity and precision impressed upon their scientific labours.'⁶⁵⁴ The Letters are incomplete; of the seven promised in the first Letter only five were published, and the fifth is essentially a digression on Kant. The Letters are also very discursive, and fail to address some of the key elements indicated; for example, there is nothing on cultivating memory, nor is there anything remotely resembling the promised 'plan of study'.

Indeed, De Quincey's two experiences of actually teaching were short-lived and unsatisfactory. He taught Wordsworth's son John for a brief period in 1813.

⁶⁵² De Quincey, 'Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected', p. 81.

⁶⁵³ De Quincey, 'Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected', p. 81.

⁶⁵⁴ De Quincey, 'Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has been Neglected', p. 84.

Dorothy Wordsworth wrote scathingly to Mary Hutchinson that John ‘goes to Mr De Quincey for a *nominal hour* every day to learn Latin upon a plan of Mr De Quincey’s own “by which a boy of the most moderate abilities may be made a good Latin scholar in six weeks!!!” This said nominal hour now generally is included in the space of twenty minutes; either the scholar learns with unusual rapidity, [...] or the Master tires.’⁶⁵⁵ A scheme to teach his own son William Latin and Greek proved equally abortive. According to Jane Carlyle, De Quincey wanted William ‘to learn [Greek] through the medium of Latin and he was not entered in Latin yet because his father wished to teach him from a grammar of his own which he had not yet begun to write.’⁶⁵⁶

De Quincey’s views on the benefits of Classical education

A further insight into De Quincey’s developing ideas about education is provided by his two-part review of James Henry Monk’s biography of the Classical scholar Richard Bentley (1662-1742), published in *Blackwood’s Magazine* in 1830. De Quincey concludes the first part of the review with a criticism of ‘modern schemes of education’ and picks up this theme in the second part of the review with an examination of what he sees as the unique advantages bestowed by a Classical, as opposed to a scientific education. It is interesting to compare De Quincey’s comments with those of Hazlitt, written some ten years previously, which take a much more sceptical view of the supposed advantages of Classical education.⁶⁵⁷ De

⁶⁵⁵ William and Dorothy Wordsworth *Letters* III, 80, quoted in Morrison, p. 167.

⁶⁵⁶ *Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, ed. by C.R. Saunders (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1970), IV, 282-3, quoted in Wilson, p. 267.

⁶⁵⁷ Hazlitt’s ideal Classical scholar was Richard Porson (1759-1808). It is possibly relevant to Hazlitt’s and De Quincey’s preferences that Porson was the son of a parish clerk, whilst Bentley was of more gentlemanly descent. Bentley eventually

Quincey begins by asking rhetorically what subjects modern educationalists propose to replace Classical studies, and responds: 'Some acquaintance with the showy parts of Experimental Philosophy and Chemistry – a little *practical* Mathematics - a slight popular survey of the facts of History and Geography – [...] a *little* Law, a *little* Divinity – perhaps even a *little* Medicine and Farriery.'⁶⁵⁸ De Quincey argues that the only 'respectable' parts of such a scheme, 'mathematics and mechanical Experimental philosophy', are already combined successfully with Classical studies at the University of Cambridge, so there is no 'innate hostility' between 'the philological researches of the Greek and Latin literature on the one hand, and the severe meditations on the other of the geometrician and the inventive analyst.'⁶⁵⁹ De Quincey then proceeds to examine the specific, rather than comparative merits of a Classical education.

De Quincey points, firstly, to the 'vast advances made in Biblical knowledge' since the Reformation, and claims that these are due, 'in great proportion, to the *general* prosecution of classical learning.' Secondly, Classical learning has a beneficial effect on character; like travel, it 'liberalizes the mind. Edmund Burke has noticed the illiberal air which is communicated to the mind by an education exclusively scientific.' This explains, in De Quincey's view, the hatred that radicals have for the Classics: 'They hate the classics for the same reason that they hate the manners of

became Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, whilst Porson by contrast was forced to resign his Fellowship at Trinity because he would not take holy orders.

⁶⁵⁸ De Quincey, 'Life of Dr Richard Bentley, D. D., By J. H. Monk, D. D.', *Works* VII, *Articles from the Edinburgh Literary Gazette and Blackwood's Magazine 1829-1831*, ed. by Robert Morrison (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2000), pp. 79-159 (p. 118). Almost certainly intentionally, the list of subjects closely resembles the proposed curriculum of Bentham's Chrestomathic school.

⁶⁵⁹ De Quincey, 'Life of Dr Richard Bentley, D. D., By J. H. Monk, D. D.', p. 119.

chivalry, or the characteristic distinctions of a gentleman.’ Classical scholars deserve respect from other scholars if only for the extent of their knowledge and, finally, ‘the *difficulty* [...] of mastering the two classical languages of antiquity [...] is itself a test of very unusual talent. [...] [N]one but a man of singular talent can attain the power of reading Greek fluently at sight.’⁶⁶⁰ De Quincey concludes that ‘a fair pleader’ could make out a strong case in favour of the true scholar being a classical scholar against any counter-argument of ‘a modern education-monger.’⁶⁶¹ As discussed in Chapter one, scientific studies had, in the late eighteenth century, and particularly following the French Revolution, come to be associated with radical ideas, as exemplified by Joseph Priestley, and with Godlessness. Amongst conservative writers such as De Quincey there was thus a political, as well as a cultural bias in favour of a Classical as opposed to a scientific education.

Despite their obvious political differences, there is some congruity between De Quincey’s and Hazlitt’s views of the advantages of a Classical education, and their shared distaste for strictly Utilitarian systems of education. Both ascribe to a Classical education a broadening of view, and an indefinable air of ‘gentility’. As described in Chapter four, Hazlitt concluded in a letter to his son that ‘there is an atmosphere round this sort of classical ground, to which that of actual life is gross and vulgar.’ Whilst Hazlitt also pointed out the accompanying dangers of a narrowly Classical education, such as a remoteness from everyday life, and a tendency

⁶⁶⁰ De Quincey, ‘Life of Dr Richard Bentley, D. D., By J. H. Monk, D. D.’, pp. 119-120. ‘Reading Greek fluently at sight’ was an ability upon which De Quincey particularly prided himself.

⁶⁶¹ De Quincey, ‘Life of Dr Richard Bentley, D. D., By J. H. Monk, D. D.’, p. 121. The term ‘education-monger’ is significant. John Stuart Mill used the term ‘religious and scientific education-mongers’ in an 1838 article to denigrate those who, in his opinion, were denying young people access to imaginative fiction; see Chapter six.

towards pointless pedantry, his opposition to Bentham's Chrestomathic school seems, in part at least, to have stemmed from a snobbish, or culturally elitist distaste for 'useful' education (see Chapter four).

Mass literacy and political unrest

Like many other conservative writers, De Quincey had concerns about the deleterious effects of mass literacy. Initially, in De Quincey's case, these concerns focused around the radicalization of the newly literate working class. The Stamp Act, introduced in 1712, had imposed a tax on newspapers, essentially making them unaffordable to the poor. A similar tax was imposed on newspapers in France at around the same time. De Quincey feared that, under pressure from radical politicians, the tax would be lowered or abolished, bringing newspapers, and 'incendiary' ideas, within the reach of the working class. In an article for *Blackwood's Magazine*, published in October 1830, De Quincey mused on the results of such a change. Seeing a link between mass education and political subversion, and noting that 'books and journals of every sort are now coming into the hands of the humblest poor', he wrote:

Immense exertions have been pushed forward by good men and bad men [...] for the last twenty-five years to promote the education of the poor: and at the very moment [...] that newspapers [...] are on the point of being carried plentifully amongst that class, the whole body are in the fullest state of preparation to read and understand them, and to follow out the worst appeals of incendiary demagogues, in the worst spirit, and to the last results.⁶⁶²

⁶⁶² De Quincey, 'Political Anticipations', *Works* VII, 212-33 (p. 219).

Not only did 'true knowledge', in De Quincey's view, not necessarily grow with 'the growth of mechanic skills in the arts of reading, writing and arithmetic', but such skills would in fact result in 'conceit and discontent' unless they were accompanied by the 'discipline of sober thinking', which formed 'no part of the modern system of tuition for the poor.'⁶⁶³ De Quincey is silent on what might constitute 'sober thinking', but given his writings elsewhere, the term probably refers to the teaching of logic as a necessary precursor to the teaching of specific subjects.

In De Quincey's opinion, newspapers were better suited than books for the spread of revolutionary ideas, because in newspapers such 'poisonous and corrupting doctrines' could be combined with 'the excitement of daily news and daily rumours' to retain the interest of working-class readers.⁶⁶⁴ In the event, the newspaper tax in France remained, whilst the Stamp Tax in Britain was considerably reduced in 1836, and abolished entirely in 1855, at which point the so-called 'penny papers', including the *Daily Telegraph*, began to appear. Contrary to De Quincey's fearful predictions, most of these publications took a conservative rather than a radical political stance.

As a diehard Tory, De Quincey, like Wordsworth and Southey, was opposed in principle to any widening of the suffrage, seeing it as leading inevitably to demagoguery and mob rule. In an article entitled 'On the Approaching Revolution in Great Britain, and its Proximate Consequences', published in *Blackwood's* in August 1831, De Quincey, adopting the persona of an ageing country landowner, suggests that by introducing a radical Reform Bill, the government had 'evoked the demon of

⁶⁶³ De Quincey, 'Political Anticipations', p. 219.

⁶⁶⁴ De Quincey, 'Political Anticipations', pp. 219-220.

robbery and confiscation, at the bidding of a mob.’⁶⁶⁵ Moreover, far from mounting any effective opposition to reform, ‘ministers, senates and nobles of the land’ were ‘co-operating with drunken zealots.’⁶⁶⁶ Whilst conceding that the ‘Approaching Revolution’ might be as bloodless as the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the narrator fears that now ‘the temptations to violence will be far stronger, [...] when the democratic interest [...] no longer acts under the restraining influence of education, and the liberality of enlightened views.’⁶⁶⁷ The language throughout the article is heated, and arguably at times verges on the hysterical, and whilst this might be ascribed in part to the persona De Quincey adopts, the tone is not dissimilar to that used around this time by Wordsworth and Southey in letters to friends.⁶⁶⁸

In a subsequent article, ‘The Prospects of Britain’, published in *Blackwood’s* in April 1832, ostensibly as a review of James Douglas’ pamphlet of the same title, De Quincey analyses the pressures that had resulted in reform. Here De Quincey takes the same line that Wordsworth had in suggesting that neither improved education nor Parliamentary reform would address the real needs and concerns of the populace. For the agricultural working class: ‘it is certain that comfortable

⁶⁶⁵ De Quincey, ‘On the Approaching Revolution in Great Britain, and its Proximate Consequences’, *Works VIII, Articles from Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine and the Gallery of Portraits; Klosterheim: or, The Masque 1831-2*, ed. by Robert Morrison (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2001), pp. 98-120 (p. 99).

⁶⁶⁶ De Quincey, ‘On the Approaching Revolution in Great Britain, and its Proximate Consequences’, p. 102.

⁶⁶⁷ De Quincey, ‘On the Approaching Revolution in Great Britain, and its Proximate Consequences’, pp. 118-119.

⁶⁶⁸ For instance, Southey wrote to C. W. Williams Wynne in March 1832, in the context of Parliamentary reform: ‘Wordsworth is more out of heart than I am because he has no constant employment to relieve him from the thoughts of impending evils.’ Southey, *New Letters of Robert Southey II*, p. 374.

subsistence could be had no longer; still less could it be hoped for in times to come'; indeed, the recent increase in Irish immigration would, by driving down the cost of labour, eventually result in 'a miserable strife for a miserable pittance.'⁶⁶⁹ In response to these concerns, reformers had offered two possible remedies. Firstly: 'Instruct the people; diffuse knowledge and education', secondly: 'Reform your Parliament, and extend the basis of your representation.' Both of these remedies, De Quincey suggests, are a mockery; 'The children of the soil ask for bread, and these counsellors would give them a stone.'⁶⁷⁰ This echoes Wordsworth's opinion that the extension of the franchise would not redress 'grievances which from the nature of things can never be eradicated' (see Chapter two).

Of educational reform, De Quincey comments that, with regard to 'the mechanic aids of knowledge – the arts of reading and writing – we have already more than a sufficient diffusion to augment our danger incalculably', unless such diffusion was supplemented by improved 'systems of religious instruction' (De Quincey is again silent on what might constitute such systems). For the actual needs of the peasantry, he asks, 'what redress could be applied by increase of knowledge?'⁶⁷¹ In a sense, De Quincey's argument echoes not only Wordsworth, but also Hazlitt, who also saw educational reform as a distraction from the real needs of the working class, although, as explained in Chapter four, Hazlitt's conclusion was almost the opposite of Wordsworth's and De Quincey's. Meanwhile, Parliamentary reform would, De Quincey suggests, provide only 'a winter's truce', followed by a

⁶⁶⁹ De Quincey, 'The Prospects of Britain', *Works* VIII, 121-152 (p. 143).

⁶⁷⁰ De Quincey, 'The Prospects of Britain', p. 144.

⁶⁷¹ De Quincey, 'The Prospects of Britain', p. 144.

‘fierce reaction of disappointment’ when the unrealistic hopes of the working class were proved to have been unfounded. Referring to the recent Reform riots in Bristol, he comments: ‘in England there are many [...] towns equally inflamed – stung with the same frenzy of jacobinal malice, conscious of deeper sufferings, and equally blind in their expectations.’⁶⁷² De Quincey’s dark forebodings of riots and revolution were, of course, not borne out by events.⁶⁷³

In his 1833 article ‘Mrs Hannah More’, De Quincey, whilst generally sarcastic about ‘Holy Hannah’, as he nicknamed her, wrote in favourable terms about her Sunday schools initiative. More had, in his words, ‘greatly strengthened her pretensions to public notice, by stepping forward as the organizer of Sunday schools, upon a scale of unusual extent with relation to the means at her disposal.’⁶⁷⁴ De Quincey describes More’s motives in establishing the schools as ‘pure, originating [...] in no love of power, but in a conscientious sense of public duty: her purpose was noble – being that of elevating the condition of human nature amongst the poorest and the humblest of her fellow creatures.’ Not only was More acting from noble motives, but, ‘her success, both directly in her own peculiar field, and remotely as a precedent which rapidly diffused and multiplied itself, was so great as to attain

⁶⁷² De Quincey, ‘The Prospects of Britain’, p. 147. The Bristol Riots of October 1831, triggered by the rejection by the House of Lords of the second Reform Bill, resulted in great damage to property in the city, and eventually to the execution of five rioters.

⁶⁷³ It is interesting to compare De Quincey’s near panic in the face of reform to Matthew Arnold’s equally fearful, and equally overblown response to the Hyde Park riot of 1867 (see Chapter six).

⁶⁷⁴ De Quincey, ‘Mrs Hannah More’, *Works IX, Articles from Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine and Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, 1832-8*, ed. by Grevel Lindop, Robert Morrison and Barry Symonds (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2001), pp. 322-357 (p. 332).

almost a national value.’⁶⁷⁵ Referring to the Blagdon controversy (discussed in Chapter three), De Quincey argues that More had dealt with the problem adeptly, given the power of the Church of England in educational matters: ‘the authority with which the English parochial clergy are invested by their official stations, make their favour at least, if not their absolute cooperation, almost a *sine qua non* towards any [...] success in schemes like those of Mrs Hannah More.’ More had emerged well from the dispute, De Quincey believed, because ‘her known interest [...] exactly coincided with her natural courtesy of disposition.’⁶⁷⁶

Although De Quincey had highly praised Andrew Bell’s Madras system of education in his 1822 review of Matthew Hill’s *Plans for the Instruction of Boys in Large Numbers*, in his 1845 article entitled *Coleridge and Opium-Eating* he expressed surprise that Coleridge had admired Bell so much as a man. De Quincey suggested that Coleridge had often used ‘ventriloquism’ to put his own ideas into others’ mouths, including Bell’s: ‘Coleridge had blown upon these withered anatomies, through the blowpipe of his own genius, a stream of gas that swelled the tissue of their antediluvian wrinkles.’ Of Bell specifically, De Quincey writes: ‘We knew him. Was he dull? Is a wooden spoon dull? Fishy were his eyes; torpendius was his manner. [...] Coleridge took [the Madras system] up; Southey also, but Southey with his usual temperate fervour. Coleridge, on the other hand, found celestial marvels both in the scheme and in the man.’⁶⁷⁷ As a consequence, De Quincey argued,

⁶⁷⁵ De Quincey, ‘Mrs Hannah More’, p. 332.

⁶⁷⁶ De Quincey, ‘Mrs Hannah More’, p. 332.

⁶⁷⁷ De Quincey, ‘Coleridge and Opium-Eating’ *Works XV, Articles from Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine, and Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine, 1844-6*, ed. by Frederick Burwick (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003), pp. 102-55 (pp. 114-115).

Coleridge had become an extreme, unthinking partisan for Bell and an equally extreme opponent of Joseph Lancaster. De Quincey chooses to ignore Southey's equally vehement opposition to Lancaster, and indeed his own partisan support for Bell. He is also silent about Wordsworth's vociferous support for Bell.

Of James Boyer, Coleridge's headmaster at Christ's Hospital, 'this horrid incarnation of whips and scourges', De Quincey suggested that Coleridge had, in *Biographia Literaria*, ascribed to him 'ideas upon criticism and taste, which every man will recognise as the intense peculiarities of Coleridge.'⁶⁷⁸ For similar reasons, De Quincey expressed scepticism regarding Coleridge's reports in *The Friend* of Alexander Ball's statements regarding mass education (see Chapter four). De Quincey, whilst expressing admiration for Ball both as a sailor and 'a true practical philosopher', stated that, 'by all we could ever learn, Sir Alexander had no taste for the abstract upon any subject, and would have read, as mere delirious wanderings, those philosophical opinions which Coleridge fastened like wings upon his respectable [...] shoulders.'⁶⁷⁹ Against De Quincey's claims, the article on Ball in the *Dictionary of National Biography* describes him as 'a man of wide culture, humanity, and judgement.'⁶⁸⁰

De Quincey's fears for the English language

⁶⁷⁸ De Quincey, 'Coleridge and Opium-Eating', p. 116. Boyer's taste for 'flogging' would have been anathema to De Quincey, who, as discussed above, detested all forms of corporal punishment.

⁶⁷⁹ De Quincey, 'Coleridge and Opium-Eating', p. 117.

⁶⁸⁰ See *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 'Ball, Sir Alexander, (1756–1809)', by Henry Frendo. <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/1210>> [Accessed 4 May 2017].

As his fears of revolution diminished, De Quincey's concerns about mass education and mass literacy gradually moved away from the purely political to worries that the English language itself was becoming corrupted. Although not a linguistic purist, De Quincey felt that the growing spread of literacy was damaging in that colloquial speech, which was a useful way of refreshing the language, was being displaced everywhere by a standardised 'newspaper English'. De Quincey set out his opinions on prose style in a lengthy four-part essay entitled 'Style', published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1840. In this essay, De Quincey argues that the 'pure racy idiom of colloquial English' could now only be found in the circles of well-educated women not too closely connected with books, because 'books [...] tend to encourage a diction too remote from the style of spoken idiom', whilst 'the language of high life has always tended to simplicity and the vernacular ideal, recoiling from every mode of bookishness.'⁶⁸¹ However, the rise of what De Quincey termed the 'evil' of newspapers, which 'every old woman in the kingdom now reads' had resulted in a 'bookish idiom [...] barking and hide-binding the fine natural pulses of the elastic flesh' of the language.⁶⁸²

As an example of this contagion of colloquial English, De Quincey cites a 'vulgar' London landlady using learned and legalistic language to explain to De Quincey the terms of his tenancy. Cian Duffy sees this anecdote as reflecting De Quincey's belief that such an appropriation of his own 'bookish language' was a sign

⁶⁸¹ De Quincey, 'Style', *Works XII, Articles from Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, 1840-1*, ed. by Grevel Lindop (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2001), pp. 3-84 (pp. 13-14).

⁶⁸² De Quincey, 'Style', p. 15.

of a lower-class 'social insurgency that must be put down.'⁶⁸³ De Quincey is, however, more obviously concerned about the effect that the increasing tendency towards 'unconscious pedantry' would have on the *educated* classes; it would in his view eventually 'stiffen the natural graces of composition, and weave fetters about the free movement of human thought. This would interfere as effectually with our power of enjoying much that is excellent in our past literature, as it would with our future power of producing.'⁶⁸⁴ Ironically, in an essay that, even by his own standards, is verbose and discursive, De Quincey then criticizes as 'another characteristic defect of this age' the 'tumid and tumultuary structure of our sentences.'⁶⁸⁵ The result of this verbosity, De Quincey argues, is that readers, to avoid wasting time, slip 'naturally into a trick of short-hand reading' and consequently form 'an incorrigible habit of desultory reading' not just of newspapers, but of books which should command closer attention.⁶⁸⁶ This is more or less the same warning about the dangers of surface reading made by Coleridge in his 1818 lecture on education, as discussed in Chapter three.

De Quincey's proposed remedy is to teach 'the business of rhetoric, the management of our mother-tongue' systematically, 'as regular a subject for training and mechanic discipline, as the science of discrete quantity in Arithmetic, or of continuous quantity in Geometry.' Such training, he argues, need not result in 'a

⁶⁸³ Cian Duffy "'His "Canaille" of an Audience": Thomas De Quincey and the Revolution in Reading, *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 44, No. 1, Thomas De Quincey: Essays upon the Occasion of a New Edition (Spring, 2005), pp. 7-22.

⁶⁸⁴ De Quincey, 'Style', pp. 16-17.

⁶⁸⁵ De Quincey, 'Style', p. 17.

⁶⁸⁶ De Quincey, 'Style', pp. 23-24.

character of mechanic monotony upon style'; it would aim solely at eliminating faults, 'above all of awkwardnesses [...] the needless jostlings and retardations of our fluent motion', allowing the language to flow freely and meaning to emerge more clearly from writing.⁶⁸⁷ As with his 'Letters to a Young Man Whose Education has Been Neglected', De Quincey promises to provide further details on his proposed methodology at some unspecified future date, but such details were never forthcoming.

De Quincey and compulsory education

De Quincey returned to the subject of mass education in an article entitled 'Logic' for *Hogg's Instructor* in 1850, at a time when, whilst the need for universal elementary education was accepted by the majority, sectarian issues were preventing its implementation. In the article, De Quincey wrote that whilst the 'external machinery of education' might have improved, the 'matter and substance' of education had not. In De Quincey's opinion, there were two ways of improving education; 'upwards, beginning from below, and downwards, beginning from above.' He argues that in Prussia, improvements in mass education 'for the lowest orders' had forced the upper class to change its own methods of study, whilst in England, the changes in education had been most noticeable in the class just above the working class. Such changes had mostly taken the form of increased 'self-education amongst those who are raised a little above the crushing necessities of unintermitting labours.' This had stemmed from the 'revolutionary nature of the times – the consequent evocation of new interests, new questions, new sympathies – and the remarkable concurrence [...] of a far cheaper and more stirring literature.' Young

⁶⁸⁷ De Quincey, 'Style', pp. 47-48. De Quincey writes that, having indicated the main failings of current style, rhetoric and composition, 'we shall leave to some future work of more suitable dimensions the filling up of our outline'.

people, 'from fourteen to twenty', were more reliant than their parents had been on intellectual resources which in turn 'presuppose a higher quality of self-culture'. Against this background, De Quincey asks, in what way would it be 'possible most effectually to cooperate with a movement so meritorious and so widely diffused?'⁶⁸⁸ One way, he suggests, would be to 'counsel choice' in reading, by which means an 'individual experience would be made available to thousands.' An alternative approach would be to develop a system of logic 'adapted to the present modes of thinking, and the modern aspects of literature.'⁶⁸⁹ As usual, De Quincey remained vague about both the means of 'counselling choice' and the details of such a 'system of logic'.

In a lengthy footnote to this article, De Quincey explains why, in his view, it had so far proved impossible to establish a truly national system of education in England, and his explanation is interesting in the light of future developments. Firstly, he states, mass education had spread fastest in Prussia, the only state in Christendom where 'education is universal and inevitable'. Far from regarding this as a credit to the Prussian state and people, however, De Quincey instead sees it as 'a badge of cognisance of [the] degradation' of the people, and the oppression of the state. He continues: 'let Prussia establish some shadow of civil liberty, so that a citizen may have the power to say "these children are mine, and it is myself that shall have the sole right to say whether they shall be educated or not", from that moment

⁶⁸⁸ De Quincey, 'Logic', *Works* XVII, *Articles from Hogg's Instructor and Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, 1850-2*, ed. by Edmund Baxter (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2001), pp. 23-32 (pp. 26-27).

⁶⁸⁹ De Quincey, 'Logic', p. 27.

the universal education in Prussia will collapse.’⁶⁹⁰ As discussed in Chapter six, Matthew Arnold took a more favourable view of systems of mass education in Continental Europe, particularly in France, contrasting them with the piecemeal provision of education in England and Wales, and did not share De Quincey’s concerns about state interference.⁶⁹¹

Widespread education is, De Quincey asserts, a good thing in principle, but not at the price paid for it in Prussia, where parental wishes and preferences are ‘set aside by summary coercion of public authority’. Moreover, in England, given the level of poverty, children were an important economic resource, and ‘no authority of the state [...] can make good this public claim upon children as subjects for education against the counter-claim of parents [...] upon these children as manufacturing tools for their own domestic necessities.’ As long as child labour was allowed,

[N]o rival claim of education can make itself heard [...] against the killing clamours of poverty on excess. This is a startling thought, [...] that precisely at this particular era, when the old forces arrayed against popular education are starting to give way before the revolutionary temper of the age, two colossal interests of man [...] are moulding themselves steadily into hostile powers and placing themselves astride of the only road upon which any *national* scheme of education can advance.⁶⁹²

⁶⁹⁰ De Quincey, ‘Logic’, pp. 26-27nn.

⁶⁹¹ In his General Report for 1867 as Inspector of Education, for example, Arnold writes: ‘In Prussia [...], education is not flourishing because it is compulsory, it is compulsory because it is flourishing. [...] When instruction is valued in this country as it is in Germany it may be made obligatory here.’ Matthew Arnold, *Reports on Elementary Schools 1853-1882* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1907), p. 117.

⁶⁹² De Quincey, ‘Logic’, p. 26n.

These ‘colossal interests’ De Quincey defines as, firstly, the interests of man ‘in his noblest rights’; that is, in the rights of men to ‘think as they please on all questions of Christian philosophy or Christian mystery.’ The other was ‘the interest of working man in his daily bread. [...] Here [...] are purposes the most high and most beneficent for social man, separately all good, and yet embattled against each other with the enmity of snakes!’⁶⁹³ In contrast to John Stuart Mill, who, exploring this conflict between the rights of parents and the rights of the State in *On Liberty* (see Chapter six), concluded that the State should have the power to compel education, De Quincey was unequivocally of the view that parents’ rights over their children were, and must remain, absolute, and that giving the State the power to compel education would amount to tyranny.

The education of De Quincey’s children

The education of De Quincey’s six surviving children, particularly that of his three daughters, was sporadic, mainly because of the family’s constant need to move house and evade the bailiffs. When his mother complained to him that a short letter from his eldest daughter Margaret contained three elementary mistakes, and offered to help pay for her grandchildren’s education, De Quincey maintained that his children were receiving an excellent education, and produced as proof receipts for payment of various governesses and teachers of music and dancing.⁶⁹⁴ Despite this,

⁶⁹³ De Quincey, ‘Logic’, p. 26n.

⁶⁹⁴ Morrison, pp. 291-292. De Quincey’s sons attended various schools. For example, Horace and Francis attended Rydal School in the Lake District whilst living with their grandparents at The Nab (Morrison, p. 259). As discussed in Chapter one, education of middle-class girls at home by governesses and tutors remained the norm until the end of the nineteenth century, and De Quincey’s daughters do not seem to have attended any school.

his daughter Emily later complained of her own ignorance and lack of training.⁶⁹⁵ However, whilst agreeing that her formal education had been neglected, writing that 'Papa left us to nature' and had 'behaved very badly by some of us for all [...] ordinary branches of education', Margaret pointed out that she and her siblings had been allowed to read whatever books they pleased amongst their father's large collection. In her words: 'I always feel grateful [to him] for never having arbitrarily withheld *any* book from us – he guided our tastes in forming judgments of them.'⁶⁹⁶ Following the death of De Quincey's wife, Margaret took over the running of the household and effectively raised her younger siblings Florence, Emily and Frederick. Emily remained single and took over the task of looking after De Quincey from Margaret after her marriage and subsequent move to Dublin.⁶⁹⁷

In an ironic contrast to Wordsworth's sons, both of whom had wished to join the Army but had for financial reasons been unable to obtain commissions, two of De Quincey's sons became Army officers. Despite his continuous financial difficulties, De Quincey and his mother between them somehow found the then enormous sum of £900 (over £87,000 at today's prices) to buy a commission for his eldest surviving son Horace, who died of malaria while on active service in the Opium Wars. His second son Frederick was found a commission in the Indian Army through the

⁶⁹⁵ Morrison, p. 292.

⁶⁹⁶ Morrison, p. 292. Margaret's words are strikingly reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's unstructured 'self-education' in her father's library; see Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: a Biography, Volume I, Virginia Stephen 1882-1912* (London: Hogarth Press, 1972), pp. 50-51.

⁶⁹⁷ Wilson, p. 308; Morrison, pp. 326-27.

patronage of the Duke of Wellington, following the intervention of Wordsworth.⁶⁹⁸

Frederick survived the Indian Mutiny and later settled in New Zealand. De Quincey's son Francis, after a short-lived apprenticeship with an Edinburgh merchant, studied at the University of Edinburgh and qualified as a surgeon, subsequently emigrating to Brazil.⁶⁹⁹

Conclusion

Over a period of some thirty years, De Quincey's writings on education represent a transitional phase between conservative writers in the early nineteenth century and liberal writers from around the middle of the century. During this period, De Quincey's priorities shifted in response to the changing social and political environment. In his earlier writings, De Quincey echoed the fears of earlier conservative writers on education, such as Sarah Trimmer and Hannah More, that the increased literacy of the working class would leave them open to exploitation by revolutionaries, unless their reading could be closely guided.

From these early fears about mass literacy leading to political instability, De Quincey's focus moved to the vulgarising effects of readily available reading matter on the middle class, and the barriers to mass education caused by the conflicting interests of working-class parents between the wish to improve their children's education and the need for the income provided by their children. The increasing restrictions on child labour, introduced in various Factory Acts throughout the

⁶⁹⁸ Morrison, p. 330. The Duke of Wellington had promised to find Frederick a commission, and De Quincey's daughter Margaret wrote to Wordsworth, by then Poet Laureate, asking him to intervene when she suspected that the promise had been forgotten.

⁶⁹⁹ Morrison, p. 365.

nineteenth century, removed this conflict by effectively reducing the value of children as economic units.

De Quincey's parallel concerns about the vulgarising effects of popular literature on the middle class, as well as echoing those of Coleridge, prefigure Matthew Arnold's warnings about the growing 'Philistinism' of the middle class in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). John Stuart Mill had earlier expressed similar concerns about the reading public's growing distaste for 'difficult' works (see Chapter six). Cian Duffy argues that a combination of intellectual snobbery about the literary tastes of the middle class and fear of insubordinate, newly-literate 'lower orders' led to De Quincey's neglect of the novel, just at the point when the novel was displacing poetry as the primary literary genre.⁷⁰⁰

⁷⁰⁰ Duffy, pp. 12-14.

Chapter Six: The 'Afterlives' of Wordsworth and Coleridge in Victorian educational theory and practice.

This final chapter explores the impact of the Romantic writers, particularly Wordsworth and Coleridge, on educational ideas in the second half of the nineteenth century. It considers the advocacy of Wordsworth's poems in an educational context by John Stuart Mill and Matthew Arnold, the influence on Mill of Coleridge's ideas about the role of the State in education, and the effects of Mill and Arnold's views on educational policies and practices.

In his study of the growth of English as an academic subject in the nineteenth century, Ian Reid explores the competing claims for Coleridge and Wordsworth as influencers.⁷⁰¹ Whilst Reid's main focus is on the growth of the study of English literature as a university subject towards the end of the nineteenth century, his early chapters examine the extent to which Coleridge and Wordsworth can be seen as direct influences on key Victorian writers. Reid cites several examples of the use of Wordsworth's poems in anthologies for schools in the Victorian era. Indeed, long before his death, Wordsworth's poetry had been introduced into schools. Alan Richardson points out that a collection of Wordsworth's poems, edited by a schoolmaster named Joseph Hine, was in use in schools by 1831.⁷⁰² There were several reasons for Wordsworth's popularity as a poet for schoolchildren. Firstly, his use of simple 'language as really used by men' made his poems particularly suited to a young, unsophisticated readership. Secondly, Wordsworth's poems were, arguably, uncontroversial both politically and religiously. Finally, Wordsworth's radical past

⁷⁰¹ Ian Reid, *Wordsworth and the Formation of English Studies* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

⁷⁰² Richardson, p. 263.

was either forgotten, or no longer problematic in the light of a reformed Parliament and the fading memory of the French Revolution.

As J. P. Ward points out, three major educational theorists in the Victorian era were great admirers of Wordsworth (John Henry Newman, John Stuart Mill and Matthew Arnold), and all three saw poetry as a necessary 'humanising' element in education. Ward argues that for Arnold and Newman, the study of literature could mitigate the de-humanising effects of industrialisation and compensate to some extent for the loss of simple Christian faith in the light of Darwinism; indeed, as discussed below, Arnold saw poetry as eventually taking the place of religion. Ward points out that Mill, lacking Arnold's and Newman's Christian beliefs, advocated the use of poetry, and the poetry of Wordsworth in particular, as a means of 'educating the feelings', following his own experiences as a young man in the early 1830s.⁷⁰³

In the later chapters of *Women and the shaping of the nation's young*, Mary Hilton explores the impact of Wordsworth and other Romantic writers on nineteenth century female educational reformers, particularly Mary Carpenter, whose work focused on 'delinquent' youths who were excluded from mainstream educational institutions. In Hilton's words 'Wordsworth's radical humanitarianism clearly attracted [the] liberal intelligentsia in an age of hunger and distress, an age in which were counterpoised contrasting scenes of spoliation through technological progress with those of extraordinary opulence.'⁷⁰⁴ As Hilton points out, Carpenter's views drew upon Wordsworth's concept of the child as a 'wild', active subject, rather than merely the passive object of adults' intentions, but it is doubtful whether the

⁷⁰³ J P Ward "'Came from Yon Fountain": Wordsworth's Influence on Victorian Educators', *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Spring, 1986), pp. 435-436.

⁷⁰⁴ Mary Hilton, pp. 195-96; p. 198.

conservative Wordsworth would have approved of Carpenter's ultra-liberal approach to the education of juvenile delinquents.⁷⁰⁵

John Stuart Mill

John Stuart Mill's father, the Utilitarian philosopher James Mill, wrote in the entry on 'Education' in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1815) that the purpose of education was 'to render the individual as much as possible an instrument of happiness, first to himself, and next to other beings'.⁷⁰⁶ John Stuart Mill was in turn unequivocal about the duty of the State to ensure satisfactory education of its citizens, writing in *On Liberty* (1859): 'Is it not almost a self-evident axiom, that the State should require and compel the education, up to a certain standard, of every human being who is born its citizen? Yet who is there that is not afraid to recognise and assert this truth?'⁷⁰⁷ It is important to note that Mill states only that the State should 'require and compel' education; as explained below, Mill's belief in the primacy of liberty and individual choice meant that he was opposed to the State either providing or funding such education, except in extreme circumstances. In an early debating speech on education, entitled 'Perfectibility', Mill's tone is not unlike Hazlitt's, asserting that 'such a system of education should exist, as will give the masses of mankind, not learning – but commonsense – practical judgment in

⁷⁰⁵ Although the term 'juvenile delinquent' became popular during the 1950s, it is recorded by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as being used as early as 1817. The *OED* also cites Dickens' invented 'Juvenile Delinquent Society' in *Oliver Twist* (1838). <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/102272?rskey=7gamL5&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid222700076> [Accessed 2 April 2018]

⁷⁰⁶ F. W. Garforth, *John Stuart Mill on Education in Society* (Oxford, Martin Robertson & Company Limited, 1979), pp. 2-3.

⁷⁰⁷ John Stuart Mill, 'On Liberty', *Collected Works XVIII, Essays on Politics and Society I*, ed. by John M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), pp. 213-310 (p. 301).

ordinary affairs, and shall enable them to see that a thing is wrong, when it is wrong, as shall make them despise humbug and see through casuistry and imposture.’⁷⁰⁸ As discussed in Chapter four, Hazlitt would have seen both ‘common sense’ and ‘practical judgment’ as best acquired through experience rather than formal education; indeed he argued that education could actually have an adverse effect on such abilities.

Mill’s solitary childhood sounds very similar to those of Coleridge and Hazlitt, although, unlike them, Mill was taught solely at home, thus, ‘as I had no boy companions, [...] my amusements, which were mostly solitary, were in general of a quiet, if not a bookish turn.’⁷⁰⁹ Mill acknowledges that even during his Utilitarian education he was allowed, indeed encouraged, by his father to read poetry. He records in his *Autobiography* having read, on his father’s recommendation, Thomson’s *The Seasons* (1726-30), Pope’s *Essay on Man* (1733-4) and Gray’s *The Bard* (1757), and the poems of William Cowper and Robert Burns. His father saw ‘scarcely any merit’ in the poetry of the nineteenth century, apart from the ‘metrical romances’ of Walter Scott.⁷¹⁰ At the age of thirteen, Mill ‘met with’ the poems of Thomas Campbell, ‘among which “Lochiel”, “Hohenlinden” and “The Exile of Erin” [...] gave me sensations I had never before experienced from poetry. Here too, I

⁷⁰⁸ Mill, ‘Perfectibility’ (1828), *Collected Works XXVI, Journals and Debating Speeches I*, ed. by John M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), pp. 428-33 (p. 433).

⁷⁰⁹ Mill, ‘Autobiography’, *Collected Works: I, Autobiography and Literary Essays*, ed. by John M. Robson and Jack Stilling (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), pp. 1-290 (p. 39).

⁷¹⁰ Mill, ‘Autobiography’, p. 19. Whilst Pope was anathema to the early Romantics, Cowper and Burns were influential in the development of both Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s poetic style.

made nothing of the longer poems, except the striking opening of “Gertrude of Wyoming”, which appeared to me as the perfection of pathos.’⁷¹¹

Mill comments that, even in what he calls ‘the most secular phase of my Benthamism’, poetry had had an emotional effect on him. He writes of Pope’s *Essay on Man* (1733-34): ‘though every opinion in it was contrary to mine, I well remember how powerfully it acted on my imagination. Perhaps at that time poetical composition of any higher type than eloquent discussion in verse, might not have produced a similar effect on me; at all events I seldom gave it an opportunity.’ Mill adds that this early phase of reading poetry was ‘short-lived’. He was then ‘theoretically indifferent’ to poetry; he ‘disliked any sentiments in poetry which I should have disliked in prose; and that included a great deal’, and at this stage he was ‘wholly blind’ to the function of poetry in ‘educating the feelings’.⁷¹²

At the age of twenty, Mill suffered a nervous breakdown following a crisis of conscience over the validity of the Utilitarian philosophy under which he had been educated and considered suicide. In an attempt at consolation he read through ‘the whole of Byron’, but with only a negative effect: ‘[Byron’s] state of mind was too like my own. His was the lament of a man who had worn out all pleasures and who seemed to think that life to all who possessed the good things of it, must necessarily be the vapid uninteresting thing which I found it.’⁷¹³

⁷¹¹ Mill ‘Autobiography’, p. 20. ‘Gertrude of Wyoming – a Pennsylvanian Tale’ (1809) is a long narrative poem by Thomas Campbell (1777-1844). Coincidentally, Matthew Arnold wrote scathingly about ‘Gertrude of Wyoming’ in one of his General Reports as Inspector of Schools: ‘the poem [...] has no great merit and is by no means universally read, even by educated people.’ Matthew Arnold, *Reports on Elementary Schools 1852-1882*, p. 161.

⁷¹² Mill, ‘Autobiography’, p. 115.

⁷¹³ Mill, ‘Autobiography’, p. 150.

Mill and Wordsworth

Mill then turned to Wordsworth's poems in the two-volume 1815 edition, which he found to be 'the precise thing for my mental wants at that particular juncture'. More specifically, Mill explains:

What made Wordsworth's poems a medicine for my state of mind, was that they expressed, not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling, and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty. [...] In them I seemed to draw from a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human beings; which had no connexion with struggle or imperfection, but would be made richer by every improvement in the physical or social condition of mankind. [...] The consequence [...] was that I gradually but completely emerged from my habitual depression.⁷¹⁴

Mill came to believe that both Coleridge and Shelley were in some ways better poets than Wordsworth (perhaps significantly, Mill quotes two lines from Coleridge's poem 'Work Without Hope' as being the truest description of his own feelings during his nervous breakdown).⁷¹⁵ Nevertheless, as Mill puts it: 'Compared with the greatest poets, [Wordsworth] may be said to be the poet of unpoetical natures, possessed of quiet and contemplative tastes. But unpoetical natures are precisely those which require poetic cultivation. This cultivation Wordsworth is much more fitted to give, than poets who are intrinsically far more poets than he.'⁷¹⁶ After this

⁷¹⁴ Mill, 'Autobiography', pp. 151-52.

⁷¹⁵ Mill, 'Autobiography', pp. 143-45. The lines are 'Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve/And hope without an object cannot live.'

⁷¹⁶ Mill, 'Autobiography', p. 153.

experience, Mill came to regard Wordsworth almost with reverence, making several visits, which amounted to pilgrimages, to Wordsworth in the 1830s. Mill wrote to a friend following one such visit that he had come to regard the whole of the Lake District as Wordsworth's 'kingdom', and that he had found Wordsworth in person to be 'still more admirable & delightful a person on a nearer view than I had figured to myself from his writings.' As Alan Gill puts it: 'Mill went to the Lake District with a formed idea of the Wordsworth he wanted to find, and found him.'⁷¹⁷

Mill set out his reasons for preferring the poetry of Wordsworth above others for the 'education of feeling' in two debates in 1829 with his fellow Utilitarian and Benthamite John Roebuck on the respective merits of Wordsworth and Byron. In Mill's words:

Wordsworth's thoughts comprise a better and more comprehensive morality than all other poets together – and alone of all poets he seems to be able to make moralizing interesting. [...] Wordsworth illustrates all the most important features of the happiest and most virtuous character and unfolds most recondite truths in morals and mental philosophy – while the poems in which he does this are by far the most delightful as mere poems that he ever wrote.⁷¹⁸

⁷¹⁷ Mill, *Collected Works* XII, *Earlier Letters 1812-1848*, ed. by Francis E. Mineka (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), pp. 80-82, cited in Alan Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 50-51.

⁷¹⁸ Mill, 'Wordsworth and Byron', *Collected Works* XXVI, 434-442 (p. 441). Roebuck was an independent Member of Parliament for most of his adult life, being elected MP for Bath in 1832 at the age of thirty and serving as an MP for various constituencies until his death in 1879. In 1843 he attempted unsuccessfully to introduce a Bill for compulsory secular education. See *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 'Roebuck, John Arthur, (1802–1879)' by S. R. Beaver.
<<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/23945>> [Accessed 2 May 2018]

As Gill points out, many of the arguments used by Mill in support of Wordsworth's poems either draw upon, or are lifted wholesale from, Wordsworth's own preface to the 1815 collection of his poems.⁷¹⁹ Mill was not, however, uncritical in his advocacy of Wordsworth's poems. Mill, like Arnold, believed Wordsworth failed when he tried to philosophize over his feelings: 'What is bad then in Wordsworth's account of his own peculiar feelings is not where he describes them, nor where he gives the history of them, but where he philosophizes over them and endeavours to account for them, as in certain parts of *The Excursion* [...] and *The Recluse*.'⁷²⁰ Mill often lamented the inability, or unwillingness, of Utilitarian thinkers to allow for the salutary effects of poetry, and an equivalent lack of understanding of philosophy amongst poets. Although, as noted above, Mill was in general critical of Wordsworth's 'philosophical' poems such as *The Excursion*, in this particular context he criticized Wordsworth for *failing* to philosophize: '[W]e must be permitted to express our regret, that a poet who has meditated as profoundly on the theory of his art [...] should have put forth nothing which can convey any adequate notion to posterity of his merits in this department.'⁷²¹

As well as describing the salutary effects of poetry on his own character, Mill defined the distinct role poets had in society, beyond that of providing purely aesthetic pleasure. This role was, in Mill's words:

[T]o batter down obstinate prejudices; to throw light on the dark places; to discover and promulgate ideas, which must be meditated for years before

⁷¹⁹ Gill, pp. 49-50.

⁷²⁰ Mill, 'Wordsworth and Byron', p. 440.

⁷²¹ Mill, 'Use and Abuse of Political Terms' *Collected Works* XVIII, 4-13 (p. 5n).

they will be appreciated; to form mankind to closer habits of thought; to shame them out of whatever is mean and selfish in their behaviour; to elevate their tastes; to inspire them with nobler and more beneficent desires; to teach them that there are virtues which they have never conceived, and pleasures beyond what they have ever enjoyed.⁷²²

There is a distinct similarity in Mill's words 'to discover and promulgate ideas, which must be meditated for years before they will be appreciated' to Shelley's claim in *A Defence of Poetry* that poets are 'the unacknowledged legislators' of their time, although *A Defence*, written in 1821, was not published until 1840.

Mill provided a more detailed explanation of the benefits of poetry in education in his Inaugural Address after being elected Rector of St Andrew's University in 1861. Beginning by outlining the relatively low value placed on poetry in Britain in the recent past ('it was hardly looked upon in any serious light, or having much value except as an amusement or excitement'), Mill went on to quote the words of Fletcher of Saltoun that 'Let who will make the laws of a people if I write their songs', adding that Fletcher's words 'might have taught us how great an instrument for acting on the human mind we were under valuing. It would be difficult for anybody to imagine that "Rule Britannia" [...] or "Scots wha hae" had no permanent influence on the higher region of human character; [...] and songs are far from being the highest or most impressive form of poetry.'⁷²³ Mill reflected that, to

⁷²² Mill, 'Attack on Literature', *The Examiner*, 12 June 1831, *Collected Works XXII, Newspaper Writings December 1822 - July 1831*, I, 318-327 (p. 325), cited in Garforth, *Educative Democracy*, p. 61.

⁷²³ Mill, 'Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews', *Collected Works XXI, Essays on Equality, Law and Education*, ed. by John M Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), pp. 215-58 (p. 252). Andrew Fletcher, known as 'Fletcher of Saltoun', was a Scottish patriot, political theorist, and book collector. See

the amazement of Englishmen, other nations had historically regarded art, in its broadest sense, as 'little inferior in importance to either its religion or its government.'⁷²⁴ Mill goes on to say that:

It is worth training [men] to feel, not only actual wrong or actual meanness, but the absence of noble aims and endeavours, as not merely blameable but also degrading; to have a feeling of the miserable smallness of mere self in the face of this great universe, of the collective mass of our fellow creatures; in the face of past history and the indefinite future. [...] We learn to respect ourselves only so far as we feel capable of nobler objects.⁷²⁵

Mill saw poetry and literature in general as the 'great source of inspiration' for such an 'elevated tone of mind', adding that although 'We may imbibe exalted feelings from Plato, or Demosthenes, or Tacitus, [...] it is only in so far as these great men are not solely philosophers or orators, or historians but poets and artists.'⁷²⁶

The advantages of poetry were, in Mill's view, not limited to promoting 'loftiness' and 'heroic feelings'. On an individual level (and here Mill drew upon his own experience):

Its power is as great in calming the soul as in cultivating it – in fostering the milder emotions, as the more exalted. It brings home to us all those aspects of life which take hold of our nature on its unselfish side, and lead us to identify

'Fletcher, Andrew, of Saltoun, (1653?-1714)' by John Robertson in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/9720>> [Accessed 2 June 2018]. 'Scots wha hae' is a lyrical poem by Robert Burns in the form of a speech given by Robert the Bruce before the Battle of Bannockburn.

⁷²⁴ Mill, 'Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews', pp. 252-53.

⁷²⁵ Mill, 'Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews', p. 254.

⁷²⁶ Mill, 'Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews', p. 254.

our joy and grief with the good or ill of the system of which we form a part; and all those solemn or pensive feelings, which, without having any direct application to conduct, incline us to take life seriously.⁷²⁷

Reading great poetry therefore directly affected an individual's personality and outlook: 'Who does not feel a better man after a course of Dante, or of Wordsworth, or [...] after brooding over Gray's "Elegy" or Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty"?'⁷²⁸ The best poetry, in Mill's view, thus addressed both the Utilitarian ideal of promoting 'the greatest happiness for the greatest number', and the Romantic ideal of elevating the individual's soul.

Expanding on the latter, Mill went on to link the idea of poetry's effect upon the individual with the corresponding effect of natural beauty, particularly that of mountainous regions:

[T]he mere contemplation of beauty of a high order produces in no small degree this elevating effect on the character. The power of natural scenery addresses itself to the same region of human nature which corresponds to Art. There are few capable of feeling the sublime order of natural beauty [...] who are not, at least temporarily, raised by it above the littleness of humanity.⁷²⁹

It is perhaps significant that Mill refers to those 'capable of feeling the sublime order of natural beauty'; this suggests that he, like Coleridge but unlike Wordsworth,

⁷²⁷ Mill, 'Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews', pp. 254-55.

⁷²⁸ Mill, 'Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews', p. 254.

⁷²⁹ Mill, 'Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews', p. 255.

believed that not everyone was equally capable of fully appreciating the beauty of scenery.

In preferring the poems of Wordsworth to those of Byron, Mill was, by implication, attacking what he saw as an increasing tendency to 'surface' reading. Noticing the spread of literacy ('Our working classes have learned to read, and our idle classes have learned to find pleasure in reading'), Mill cautions that, because reading has become 'one of the most approved and fashionable ways of killing time [...] the number of persons who have skimmed the surface of literature is far greater than at any previous period in our history.'⁷³⁰ As a result, in Mill's view, the standard of writing had declined, as authors were forced to write on demand to satisfy the needs of a growing number of 'light' periodicals. As he put it in his 1836 essay 'On Civilization': '[W]e see that literature is becoming more and more ephemeral: books, of any solidity, are almost gone by; even reviews are not now considered sufficiently light; the attention cannot sustain itself on any serious subject, even for the space of a review-article.' Mill concludes that 'literature becomes more and more a mere reflection of the current sentiments, and has almost entirely abandoned its mission as an enlightener and improver of them.'⁷³¹ These sentiments echo Wordsworth's (possibly slighting) reference to reading as a 'gentlemanly occupation' (see Chapter two), and Coleridge's warnings against the voracious, unthinking reading of 'modern novels' in *Biographia Literaria*.

Mill's views on education

⁷³⁰ Mill, 'The Present State of Literature' (1827) *Collected Works* XXVI, 409-417 (pp. 411-412).

⁷³¹ Mill, 'On Civilization', *Collected Works* XVIII, 135.

Despite his positive view of Wordsworth's poetry, Mill was scathingly critical of the Bell system of pupil-monitors which Wordsworth and Coleridge had so strongly advocated several decades previously, and which was still in operation in many schools in the 1830s.⁷³² Mill believed that Bell's system, and the rival Lancaster system, invariably led to the sort of 'cramming' which neither required nor encouraged independent thinking. Mill felt this approach led eventually to a fundamental separation in children's minds between words and the things to which they related. Coleridge had pointed out this danger when writing of William Pitt the Younger's education, which was conducted under methods similar to Mill's (see Chapter three), but had not identified it as a danger in Bell's system.

In his 1832 article 'Reform in Education', Mill quotes at length from George Edward Biber's *Lectures on Christian Education* (1830). Biber was equally critical of the National schools, which derived from Joseph Lancaster's monitorial system, and of the British schools, which derived from Andrew Bell's rival model. Biber cites many examples of schoolchildren being able to define words only in the context of other words; the fatal dissociation between word and object that Coleridge and others had warned about had, ironically, been reinforced by the very system which Coleridge had advocated.

For Mill, the rote learning approach of both monitorial systems was fundamentally flawed; it was, in Biber's words: 'the direct way of preventing [children] from ever thinking about what they are doing, and thus cutting off every

⁷³² The two systems remained in place for much of the nineteenth century, although the use of pupil-teachers diminished. The 'British' schools were subsumed into the non-denominational system of elementary education in England and Wales following the Forster Education Act of 1870, whilst many of the 'National' schools remained under the control of the Church of England.

chance of their understanding it.’⁷³³ Worse still, the methods of the monitorial systems had spread to infant schools, which had thereby become merely ‘treadmill[s] for the minds of the poor children’.⁷³⁴ Mill was enraged that ‘an institution designed for *moral* culture only – a place where a child learned nothing, in the vulgar sense of learning, but only learned to live; that places designed exclusively for the cultivation of the kindly affections, should, by dulness, hardness and miserable vanity, be converted into places for parroting gibberish.’⁷³⁵ The tone here is remarkably similar to that used by Wordsworth and Coleridge in their later criticisms of infant schools as discussed in Chapters two and three. As explained below, Mill was later unwittingly instrumental in ensuring the continuation of such practices.

As F. W. Garforth points out, Mill, reacting against his own ‘hothouse’ education and reverting to the earlier ideas of Comenius, Locke, and Rousseau, advocated learning through discovery: ‘I must verify [what my teacher tells me] by my own observation, or by interrogating my own consciousness.’⁷³⁶ Mill followed Rousseau in arguing that such child-centred education did not mean allowing the child to do as they pleased; education should take place within a controlled environment; Rousseau’s ‘well-regulated liberty’.⁷³⁷ Indeed, despite his reputation as

⁷³³ Biber, pp. 162-65, quoted in Mill, ‘Reform in Education’, *Collected Works* XXI, 61-74 (p. 68).

⁷³⁴ Biber, pp. 172-77, quoted in Mill, ‘Reform in Education’, p. 73.

⁷³⁵ Mill, ‘Reform in Education’, pp. 70-71.

⁷³⁶ Mill, ‘On Genius’, *Collected Works* I, 331, cited in Garforth, *Educative Democracy: John Stuart Mill on Education in Society*, p. 185.

⁷³⁷ Rousseau, *Emile*, p. 92, cited in Garforth, *Educative Democracy: John Stuart Mill on Education in Society* p. 186.

an advocate of individual liberty, Mill was perhaps surprisingly authoritarian in his ideas about children's education. In his *Autobiography*, he writes: 'I do not believe, that boys can be induced to apply themselves [...] to dry and irksome studies, by the sole force of persuasion and soft words. Much [...] must be learnt, by children, for which rigid discipline, and known liability to punishment, are indispensable as means.'⁷³⁸ Moreover, Mill deplored the increasing tendency in 'modern education' to teach children only what is 'easy and interesting' to learn; in his view this sacrificed one of the chief objects of education, and risked 'training up a race of men incapable of doing anything which is disagreeable to them.'⁷³⁹

Mill's reservations about the way in which education was carried out echo those expressed by Coleridge in his lectures on education (see Chapter 3). In an essay entitled 'On Genius', published under a pseudonym in the *Monthly Repository* in October 1832, Mill criticized 'modern education' as 'all *cram* – Latin cram, mathematical cram, literary cram, political cram, theological cram, moral cram. The world already knows everything, and has only to tell it to its children who, on their part, have only to hear, and lay it to rote (not to *heart*).'⁷⁴⁰ The underlying problem from Mill's point of view was that, at school, 'what is the child taught, except to repeat by rote, or at most to apply technical rules, which are lodged, not in his reason, but in his memory? When he leaves school, does not everything which a young person sees and hears conspire to tell him, that it is not expected that he shall

⁷³⁸ Mill, 'Autobiography', p. 53.

⁷³⁹ Mill, 'Autobiography', pp. 53-54.

⁷⁴⁰ Mill, 'On Genius' (1832), *Collected Works I*, 327-40 (p. 337). It is interesting that Arnold, defending rote-learning, describes it specifically as 'learning by heart'; see Arnold, *Reports on Elementary Schools 1852-1882*, p. 273.

think, but only that he shall profess no opinion on any subject different from that professed by other people?’⁷⁴¹ Moreover, ‘the most valuable kind of mental gymnastics’ previously provided by disciplines such as logic and metaphysics was becoming rarer, and even the ancient languages which ‘when rationally taught are [...] a lesson of logical classification and analysis’, as well as giving access to ‘a literature more rich than any other’ were ‘insensibly falling into disrepute as a branch of liberal education.’⁷⁴² Mill’s proposed solution, again echoing Coleridge, was that education should focus on teaching children *how* to think: ‘Let the education of the mind consist in calling out and exercising [its] faculties: never trouble yourself about giving knowledge – train the *mind* – keep it supplied with materials, and knowledge will come of itself. Let all *cram* be ruthlessly discarded.’⁷⁴³

Mill expanded on the theme of types of instruction, and the danger of separating words from things, in his review of Horace Grant’s *Arithmetic for Young Children and Exercises for the Improvement of the Senses* (1835).⁷⁴⁴ Mill writes that:

It has [...] been long felt that there are two methods of what is called instruction [...]. One of these is the system of *cram*; the other is the system of cultivating mental *power*. [...] One treats a child like a creature that has nothing but a memory, and loads that memory with words, trusting to Providence for enabling the child some time or other to put meaning into

⁷⁴¹ Mill, ‘On Genius’, p. 337.

⁷⁴² Mill, ‘On Genius’, p. 338.

⁷⁴³ Mill, ‘On Genius’, p. 338.

⁷⁴⁴ Mill, review of Horace Grant’s *Arithmetic for Young Children and Exercises for the Improvement of the Senses*, published in the *Globe and Traveller*, 23 October 1835, *Collected Works XXIV, Newspaper Writings II*, ed. by Ann P. Robson and John M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), pp. 785-87.

those words; the other trusts the child to possess intelligence as well as memory, and believes it to be the main object of instruction to strengthen that intelligence.⁷⁴⁵

As discussed in Chapters three and four, both Coleridge and Hazlitt had criticized the concentration on purely mechanical memory as a way of testing children's knowledge and understanding. Mill commends Grant's book as presenting ideas to children 'in such an order, that the child's intellect is carried with him throughout; and at every step the child acquires not only a set of sounds, but ideas, and with those ideas the habit of really discovering truths for himself; of using his eyes, his hands, [...] and his first nascent powers of judgement and reasoning.'⁷⁴⁶ There is, however, an unresolved conflict here between Mill's advocacy of children learning through discovery, and his suggestion elsewhere that 'rigid discipline and known liability to punishment' will be needed to force children to learn.

Mill had serious reservations, not only about the quality of teaching at public schools and universities, but also with proposed Utilitarian reforms to these institutions. He wrote in 'Civilization' (1836) that 'We are at issue equally with the admirers of Oxford and Cambridge, and with the generality of their professed reformers. We regard the system of those institutions [...] with sentiments little short of utter abhorrence.' However, demonstrating how far he had moved away from the views of 'pure' Utilitarian reformers such as Bentham, Mill goes on to say that 'we do not conceive that their vices would be cured by bringing their studies

⁷⁴⁵ Mill, review of Horace Grant's *Arithmetic for Young Children and Exercises for the Improvement of the Senses*, p. 786.

⁷⁴⁶ Mill, review of Horace Grant's *Arithmetic for Young Children and Exercises for the Improvement of the Senses*, p. 787.

into a closer connexion with [...] “the business of the world”; by dismissing the logic and classics which are still professedly taught, to substitute modern languages and experimental physics.’ What Mill saw as fundamental in education was ‘the great business of every rational being – the strengthening and enlarging of his own intellect and character’; the ‘empirical knowledge which the world demands [...] the stock in trade of money-getting-life’ he would leave for the world itself to provide.⁷⁴⁷ Mill goes on to praise ‘ancient literature’, however imperfectly it was currently taught, as being ‘the sole ennobling feature in the slavish, mechanical thing which the moderns call education.’⁷⁴⁸

In his review of William Ware’s translation of Piso’s *Letters from Palmyra* (1838), Mill describes what he sees as the effects of an educational system increasingly dominated by ‘the religious and [...] the scientific education-mongers’, who between them were denying access to the sort of fiction that would ‘awaken high aspirations’ by representing characters ‘whose actions and sentiments were of a more generous and loftier order than ordinarily to be met with [...] in every-day life.’⁷⁴⁹ Such books, in Mill’s view, were potentially just as powerful ‘instruments of national education’ as the ‘catalogues of physical facts and theological dogmas’ with which they had been replaced. He added: ‘Not what a boy or girl can repeat by rote, but what they have learnt to love and admire, is what forms their character.’⁷⁵⁰ In words similar to those used by Coleridge in his defence of imaginative literature, Mill

⁷⁴⁷ Mill, ‘Civilization’, pp. 138-39.

⁷⁴⁸ Mill, ‘Civilization’, pp. 144-45.

⁷⁴⁹ Mill, ‘Ware’s *Letters from Palmyra*’ (1838), *Collected Works* I, 431-62 (pp. 459-60).

⁷⁵⁰ Mill, ‘Ware’s *Letters from Palmyra*’, p. 460.

asserts that the popular novels of the day teach only 'worldliness' and the sort of 'huckstering virtues which conduce to getting on in the world', and concludes, that, whilst they might have lacked realism, the 'old romances, whether of chivalry or of faery [...] filled the youthful imagination with pictures of heroic men, and of what are at least as much wanted, heroic women.'⁷⁵¹ Mill was at this point equally opposed to the narrowly sectarian religious education of the British and National Schools and the narrowly factual education of the Utilitarian type envisaged by Jeremy Bentham. It is significant in this context that amongst the subjects Bentham had proposed to exclude from the curriculum of the Chrestomathic school was belles-lettres, including all types of literary composition and criticism.⁷⁵²

Despite his misgivings about the effects of mass literacy, Mill saw the spread of education to the working class as beneficial both for individuals and for society. He believed its spread to be an inevitable consequence of growing wealth, which: 'by conferring on the working classes the inestimable benefit of leisure [...] forces them to seek education.'⁷⁵³ Mill consistently urged some minimal level of education as a necessary requirement to extending the franchise. In Mill's words: 'there is surely no reason why every one who applies to be registered as an elector, should not be required to copy a sentence in English in the presence of the registering officer, and

⁷⁵¹ Mill, 'Ware's *Letters from Palmyra*', p. 460.

⁷⁵² Jeremy Bentham, *Chrestomathia* in *Collected Works*, ed. by M. J. Smith and W. H. Burson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 18, Table 1. These subjects were to be excluded as being of 'not sufficiently general' utility. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Wordsworth also expressed doubts about the value of belles-lettres as an academic discipline in the context of the new University of London.

⁷⁵³ Mill, 'The Utility of Knowledge' (1823), *Collected Works* XXVI, 257-60 (p. 259).

to perform a common sum in the rule of three.’⁷⁵⁴ This was exactly the opposite view to that of earlier Radicals, such as Hazlitt, who had argued that mass enfranchisement was a natural right and should therefore not be conditional upon education. (See Chapter four). Moreover, Mill argued in favour of a system of plural voting, with an ‘ordinary unskilled labourer’ having one vote, increasing to five or six votes for a member of ‘any profession requiring a long, accurate and systematic mental cultivation, - a lawyer, a physician or surgeon, a clergyman of any denomination, a literary man, an artist, a public functionary.’ University graduates would be allowed at least five votes as a matter of course.⁷⁵⁵ In Mill’s view, some such system was essential if the least-educated were not to gain control of government under a system of universal suffrage, stating that: ‘None are so illiberal, none so bigoted in their hostility to improvement, none so superstitiously attached to the stupidest and worst of old forms and usage, as the uneducated. [...] An uneducated mind is almost incapable of clearly conceiving of the rights of others.’⁷⁵⁶

Unusually for the time, and in contrast to the misogynistic views of Hazlitt, Mill advocated truly *universal* suffrage, in which all women as well as all men would have the vote. Given his views about education as a necessary condition of the franchise, Mill focused on the limited and unequal education then available to girls. In a speech to the House of Commons on 26 May 1867 advocating equal suffrage for men and women, Mill asked: ‘Are there many fathers who care as much, or are

⁷⁵⁴ Mill, ‘Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform’ (1859), *Collected Works XIX, Essays on Politics and Society II*, ed. by John M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), pp. 311-339 (p. 327).

⁷⁵⁵ Mill, ‘Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform’, pp. 324-25.

⁷⁵⁶ Mill, ‘Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform’, p. 327.

willing to expend as much, for the education of their daughters, as of their sons? Where are the Universities, where are the High Schools, or the schools of any high description, for them?'⁷⁵⁷ Mill pointed out that charitable trusts originally established for the education of both boys and girls were not being used fairly, or for the purposes intended by the benefactors: 'What has become of the endowments which the bounty of our ancestors destined for the education, not of one sex only, but both indiscriminately? [...] Christ's Hospital [...] now maintains and educates 1100 boys, and exactly 26 girls.'⁷⁵⁸

Mill and Coleridge

As well as drawing on Coleridge's ideas on the value of imaginative fiction, Mill greatly admired him as a philosopher. In his 1840 essay 'Coleridge', Mill stated that Coleridge's influence 'extends far beyond those who share in the peculiarities of his religious or philosophical creed. He has been the great awakener in this country of the spirit of philosophy, within the bounds of traditional opinions.'⁷⁵⁹ Comparing Coleridge to Bentham, Mill argues that, despite their very different beliefs, both 'agreed in making it their occupation to recal [sic] opinions to first principles; taking no proposition for granted without examining into the grounds of it, and

⁷⁵⁷ Mill, speech to the House of Commons, 26 May 1867, *Collected Works* XXVIII, *Public and Parliamentary Speeches I*, ed. by John M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), pp. 151-61 (p. 159).

⁷⁵⁸ Mill, speech to the House of Commons, 26 May 1867, p. 159. At this time, almost all public schools were for boys only. Christ's Hospital was one of the few exceptions, but, as well as the discrepancy in numbers pointed out by Mill, the education offered to the girls was at a much lower level than that offered to the boys. See Frances M. Page, *Christ's Hospital, Hertford* (London: G. Bell Ltd., 1953), Chapter VI.

⁷⁵⁹ Mill, 'Coleridge', *Collected Works* X, *Essays on Ethics, Religion and Society*, ed. by John M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), pp. 119-63 (p. 119).

ascertaining that it possessed the kind and degree of evidence suitable to its nature.’⁷⁶⁰

In the context of education, Mill saw Coleridge’s approach as having two particular merits. Firstly, by pointing out the discrepancy between what a national church establishment was, and what it ought to be, Coleridge and his followers had ‘done more than would have been effected in thrice the time by Dissenters and Radicals, to make the Church ashamed of the evil of her ways, and to determine that movement of improvement from within, which has begun where it ought to begin, at the Universities and among the younger clergy.’⁷⁶¹ Secondly, Coleridge had vindicated the concept of ‘an endowed class, for the cultivation of learning, and for diffusing its results among the community. [...] On this subject we are entirely at one with Coleridge [...] and we consider the definitive establishment of this fundamental principle, to be one of the permanent benefits which political science owes to the Conservative philosophers.’⁷⁶² As John Robson points out in his Introduction, what Mill saw in Coleridge’s ideas in contrast to those of the Utilitarians was ‘a mind alive to the complexity of human nature, of human society, of human institutions, and a healthy corrective to the arid and formalist reduction of eighteenth-century thought.’⁷⁶³ Mill’s idea of a cultured, educated class which could be entrusted to lead society was similar to Coleridge’s concept of a ‘clerisy’ set out in *On the Constitution*

⁷⁶⁰ Mill, ‘Coleridge’, pp. 120-21.

⁷⁶¹ Mill, ‘Coleridge’, p. 150.

⁷⁶² Mill, ‘Coleridge’, pp. 150-151.

⁷⁶³ Mill, *Collected Works* X, Introduction, p. xxxiv.

of Church and State, but Mill went further than Coleridge in urging social mobility through education, with individuals' ability being tested by regular examinations.

Notwithstanding his admiration for Coleridge's thinking, Mill was fundamentally opposed to the Church of England being given an exclusive or even the leading role in the provision of education. In his essay on Coleridge, he argues that, given the multiplicity of religious sects, the State had no option but to continue with 'the imperfect scheme' of allowing each sect to provide its own religious instruction. The alternative would be to entrust education to 'perhaps the most unfit body for the purpose for the exclusive charge of it that could be found among persons of any intellectual attainments, namely the established clergy as at present trained and composed. Such a body would have no chance of being selected as the exclusive administrators [...] on any foundation other than that of divine right.'⁷⁶⁴ Mill reiterated this view in his 1866 paper on 'Educational Endowments' submitted to the Education Commissioners, stating that: 'It is evidently proper that the restriction, in many foundations, of the office of schoolmaster to persons in holy orders, should be abolished.'⁷⁶⁵ In state schools at least, the non-denominational nature of the elementary schools established by the 1870 Education Act addressed this point, whilst the Universities Tests Act of 1871 removed all restrictions on non-Christians taking up fellowships at Oxford, Cambridge and Durham.

Matthew Arnold

Matthew Arnold had known Wordsworth for many years. Arnold's father, Thomas Arnold, the reforming headmaster of Rugby School, had been friends with

⁷⁶⁴ Mill, 'Coleridge', p. 150.

⁷⁶⁵ Mill, 'Educational Endowments', *Collected Works* XXI, 210-214 (p. 214).

Wordsworth since 1824, when Matthew Arnold was only two. As Leon Gottfried points out, this familiarity with Wordsworth gave Arnold some perspective on both Wordsworth and his poems. In the preface to his selection of Wordsworth's poems, Arnold wrote:

It is not for nothing that one has been brought up in the veneration of a man so truly worthy of homage; that one has seen him and heard him, lived in his neighbourhood, and been familiar with his country. No Wordsworthian has a tenderer affection for this pure and sage master than I, or is less really offended by his defects.⁷⁶⁶

Arnold held that Wordsworth's best work, which he believed had all been written in the ten years between 1798 and 1808, had been obscured by a 'mass of inferior work [...] imbedding the first-rate work and clogging it, obstructing our approach to it.'⁷⁶⁷

Arnold, like Mill, had little time for Wordsworth's longer, philosophical poems, such as *The Excursion*. In his Preface to his selection of Wordsworth's poems, Arnold quotes an extract from the section of Book IX of *The Excursion* dealing with national education, and imagines it being quoted 'at a Social Science Congress [...] in one of our dismal provincial towns; dusty air and jaded afternoon daylight; benches full of men with bald heads and women in spectacles; [...] in the soul of any poor child of nature who may have wandered in [...] an unutterable sense of lamentation,

⁷⁶⁶ Arnold, 'Wordsworth' *Complete Prose Works* IX, *English Literature and Irish Politics*, ed. by R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1973), 36-55 (p. 55), cited in Leon Gottfried, *Matthew Arnold and the Romantics* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 7.

⁷⁶⁷ Arnold, 'Wordsworth', p. 42.

and mourning, and woe!’⁷⁶⁸ In the Preface to his selection of Byron’s poems, Arnold quotes the opening line from the same section of *The Excursion*: ‘O for the coming of that glorious time’ as an example of Wordsworth’s ‘pompous dulness [sic]’.⁷⁶⁹ Arnold saw Wordsworth’s true worth as being hidden by the unthinking adoration of those he termed ‘Wordsworthians’, who praised all of Wordsworth’s poems without discrimination. (In contrast to Mill’s respect for Coleridge, Arnold saw Coleridge as a ‘poet and philosopher wrecked in a mist of opium.’)⁷⁷⁰

Whilst Mill was an influential commentator and, from 1865 to 1868, the Member of Parliament for Westminster, he did not have any direct influence on, or any first-hand experience of how poetry was taught in schools.⁷⁷¹ Matthew Arnold, some twenty years Mill’s junior, was an Inspector of Schools from 1851 until his retirement in 1886, and was therefore in a good position to judge to what extent, and with what effect, poetry had become part of the elementary school curriculum, and also to have some limited influence on how it was taught. Arnold wrote a series of Annual Reports on Elementary Schools from 1852 until his retirement in 1882, and these provide a useful insight into what comprised literary education in elementary

⁷⁶⁸ Arnold, ‘Wordsworth’, p. 50; the lines quoted are 293-302.

⁷⁶⁹ Arnold, ‘Byron’, *Complete Prose Works* IX, 217-237 (p. 230). As Super points out in his explanatory notes, the line quoted comes from the section of *The Excursion* arguing for the State’s responsibility for elementary education, a sentiment with which Arnold would have agreed, however dull he found Wordsworth’s poetical treatment of the subject.

⁷⁷⁰ Arnold, ‘Byron’, p. 237.

⁷⁷¹ Mill attended neither school nor university, and this lack of direct experience of formal education may have led to him having unreasonable expectations of the sort of teaching that schools could provide. For example, Mill believed that the mathematical aspects of the curriculum at Cambridge was no more than could be easily mastered in six months by a ‘boy of fourteen of ordinary capacity’. Mill, ‘The Universities’ (1826), *Collected Works* XXVI, 348-58 (p. 351).

schools during that period. (A selection from the reports, edited by F. S. Martin, was published by His Majesty's Stationery Office in 1908.)

At the request of the Newcastle Commission, appointed to inquire into the state of popular education in England, Arnold visited the Continent in 1859 to examine methods of education in France, Switzerland and Holland and compare them to those used in English schools.⁷⁷² One aspect he explored was the use of literature, and here he found English schools at a distinct disadvantage compared to their French counterparts:

In the study of the mother-tongue the French school-boy has a [...] real advantage over ours; he certainly does learn something of the French language and literature, and of the English our schoolboy learns nothing. [...] French literature possesses prose works, perhaps even poetical works, more fitted to be used as classics for schoolboys than any which English literature possesses. I need not say that the fitness of works for this purpose depends on other considerations than those of the genius alone which they exhibit.⁷⁷³

Arnold also praised the French system of national education, 'which [...] is all that a Government can prudently attempt to make universal – a system fixing a low level, certainly, of popular instruction, but one which the rising tide of national wealth [...] will inevitably push up higher.'⁷⁷⁴ He cautioned against expanding the existing English voluntary system, still divided between the Church of England's National

⁷⁷² The Newcastle Commission was appointed by Royal Warrant on 30 June 1858 to 'Enquire into popular education in England'.

⁷⁷³ Arnold, 'A French Eton', *Complete Prose Works II, Democratic Education*, ed. by R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965), pp. 262-327 (p. 270).

⁷⁷⁴ Arnold, 'Popular Education of France', *Complete Prose Works II, Democratic Education*, pp. 13-166 (p. 164).

schools and the Dissenters' British schools, into a national system. The main objection to such a move, from Arnold's point of view, was that it would make national 'a system [...] which submissively accompanies the hatefulest [sic] and most barren of all dispute, religious dispute, into its smallest channels; - stereotypes every crotchet, every prejudice, every division.'⁷⁷⁵

Building on the findings of his Continental tour in his Inspector's report of 1861, Arnold addressed the issue of the lack of good reading books in English schools:

I have seen school-books belonging to the [...] most popular series in use in our primary schools, in which far more than half of the poetical extracts were the compositions either of the anonymous compilers themselves, or of American writers of the second or third order. [...] To this defectiveness of our reading-books I attribute much of that grave and discouraging deficiency in anything like literary taste and feeling, which [...] even well-instructed pupil-teachers [...] continue almost invariably to exhibit.⁷⁷⁶

In Arnold's view, the introduction of better reading books would, more than anything, 'afford the best chance of inspiring quick scholars with a real love [...] of literature', with the added advantage that 'the literature for which they acquired a taste would be a good, a sound, and a truly refining literature; not a literature [...]

⁷⁷⁵ Arnold, *Popular Education of France*, p. 165. In the event, the Elementary Education Act of 1870, which introduced compulsory elementary education, allowed the existing voluntary schools to continue, but brought them under the aegis of the school boards. The newly established state schools provided limited, non-denominational religious teaching.

⁷⁷⁶ Arnold, 'Inspector's Report for January 1861', quoted in *Complete Prose Works II*, Notes, p. 341.

over which no cultivated person would dream of wasting his time.'⁷⁷⁷ At around the same time, D. Middleton, the inspector for Church of Scotland schools, who had himself been pressing for better reading books, reported an improvement: 'The school reading-books now publishing are greatly superior to most of their predecessors. [...] This is true, both of the prose and verse, now offered for school-reading.'⁷⁷⁸

In contrast to Mill, Arnold placed what he termed 'great value' on rote learning and suggested that poetry should be preferred to prose for such exercises. In his General Report for 1863, Arnold wrote that: 'the *learning by heart* from good authors is [...] a lesson offering great value. [...] No more useful change has been introduced than that which has lately been added of learning by heart passages from some standard author.'⁷⁷⁹ He reported that in most elementary schools 'the whole upper part of the school [...] learn by heart from one to three hundred lines of good poetry.'⁷⁸⁰ Arnold's views on this remained unchanged; in his General Report for 1882, he commented: 'people talk contemptuously of "learning lines by heart", but if a child is brought [...] to *throw himself into* a piece of poetry, an exercise of creative activity has been set up in him.'⁷⁸¹ In his 1863 Report, Arnold goes on to state what,

⁷⁷⁷ Arnold, 'Inspector's Report for January 1861' quoted in *Complete Prose Works II*, Notes, p. 342.

⁷⁷⁸ Arnold, 'Inspector's Report for January 1861', quoted in *Complete Prose Works II*, Notes, p. 342. An editorial note comments that, at around this time, both Nelson's School Series and Longman's Graduated Series of Reading-Lesson Books were being introduced into schools.

⁷⁷⁹ Arnold, *Reports on Elementary Schools 1852-1882*, pp. 98-99.

⁷⁸⁰ Arnold, *Reports on Elementary Schools 1852-1882*, p. 186.

⁷⁸¹ Arnold, *Reports on Elementary Schools 1852-1882*, p. 228.

in broad terms, he saw as the benefits of learning poetry, and these are not dissimilar to those described by Mill. Primarily, the distinctive quality of poetry was what Arnold termed its 'formative' nature. In Arnold's words: 'Good poetry is formative; it has too the precious power of achieving by itself and in a way managed by nature, not through the instrumentality of that somewhat terrible character, the scientific instructor.'⁷⁸² Arnold was less concerned than Mill about the risk of dissociation between words and their meaning arising from rote-learning, as he believed that 'even the rhythm and diction of good poetry are capable of exercising some formative effect, even though the sense be imperfectly understood.'⁷⁸³

Arnold, like Mill, placed a particularly high value on Wordsworth's poetry. As Gottfried puts it: 'Arnold believed Wordsworth to be, of all modern poets, uniquely qualified by the purity, truth, elevation and, at its best, beauty of both his style and his moral vision for carrying on among the populace the beneficent spiritual labour which he, like his master, believed to be poetry's high calling.'⁷⁸⁴ Indeed, Arnold went even further than Wordsworth in this respect, seeing poetry as eventually taking the place of religion and philosophy in meeting humanity's spiritual needs. As he put it in *Thoughts on Poetry* (1872), 'More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us [...]; most of what now passes [...] as

⁷⁸² Arnold, *Reports on Elementary Schools 1852-1882*, p. 187. Arnold's implied criticism of the 'scientific instructor' is significant. Unlike Mill, who saw no need for conflict between the arts and sciences as academic disciplines, Arnold in his reports celebrated schoolchildren's preference for poetry above other subjects. See for example his General Report for 1880, in which he claims that in Westminster schools 'a decisive majority' of pupils would prefer poetry over scientific subjects (ibid, p. 200).

⁷⁸³ Arnold, *Reports on Elementary Schools 1852-1882*, p. 187.

⁷⁸⁴ Gottfried, p. 71.

religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry.’⁷⁸⁵ Such an idea would, of course, have been anathema to the deeply religious Wordsworth. Significantly, when the issue of secular education arose in the debates about compulsory education leading up to Forster’s 1870 Elementary Education Act, Arnold suggested that the Bible should be studied in schools primarily as a work of literature. As he put it, Bible studies should be: ‘part of the regular school work, to be submitted for inspection and to be seen in its strength or weakness like any other. [...] There was no Greek school in which Homer was not read; cannot our popular schools, with their narrow range and their jejune [...] secular literature, do as much for the Bible?’⁷⁸⁶ For a ‘broad church’ Anglican such as Arnold, this would have seemed an uncontroversial proposal, but he clearly failed to grasp the particular significance attached to the Bible as Holy Writ both by Evangelical Anglicans and Dissenters.

As well as extolling the ‘character-forming’ benefits of poetry, Arnold, in his reports as Inspector of Schools, highlighted its utilitarian value in an educational context, that of ‘remedying what I have noticed as the signal mental defect of our school children – their almost incredible scantiness of vocabulary. We expand their vocabulary, and with their vocabulary, their whole circle of ideas.’⁷⁸⁷ He was, however, unimpressed by the current teaching of what he termed ‘that immense field called literature’, where ‘neither plan nor order of study exists, or any well-

⁷⁸⁵ Arnold, ‘The Study of Poetry’, *Complete Prose Works* IX, 161-88 (pp. 161-62), cited in Gottfried, p. 70.

⁷⁸⁶ Arnold, General Report for 1869, *Reports on Elementary Schools 1852-1882*, pp. 138-39.

⁷⁸⁷ Arnold, General Report for 1869, *Reports on Elementary Schools 1852-1882*, p. 188. Arnold gives as examples of poor vocabulary the inability of most elementary schoolchildren to accurately define such words as ‘ford’ and ‘steed’.

conceived choice of books. [...] The whole use that the Government makes of the mighty engine of literature in the education of the working classes, amounts to little more [...] than [...] giving them the power to read the newspapers.’⁷⁸⁸ Arnold goes on to explain what he means by ‘good poetry’ in the context of teaching elementary schoolchildren:

We must not be so rigid as to exclude all poetry but the very best. [...] Still, an effort should be made to fix the standard high. Gray’s ‘Elegy’ and extracts from Shakespeare should be chosen in preference to the poetry of Scott and Mrs Hemans, and very much of the poetry in our present school reading books should be entirely rejected.⁷⁸⁹

As explained below, Arnold later lowered his sights regarding the type of poetry he recommended as suitable for elementary schoolchildren.

In his General Report for 1880, Arnold invoked Wordsworth directly in support of the use of poetry in teaching, writing ‘Wordsworth says: “To be incapable of a feeling of poetry, in my sense of the word, is to be without love of human nature and reverence for God”. And it is only through acquaintance with poetry [...] that this “feeling of poetry” can be given.’⁷⁹⁰ Good poetry, in Arnold’s opinion, thus helped to form the soul and character, and to nurture ‘a love of truth and beauty in allegiance

⁷⁸⁸ Arnold, ‘General Report for 1869’, *Reports on Elementary Schools 1852-1882*, 142. Is there perhaps an echo here, conscious or unconscious, of Wordsworth’s phrase ‘this simple engine’ in *The Excursion* relating to Bell’s monitorial system?

⁷⁸⁹ Arnold, ‘General Report for 1869’, *Reports on Elementary Schools 1852-1882*, p. 188.

⁷⁹⁰ Arnold, ‘General Report for 1880’, *Reports on Elementary Schools 1852-1882*, p. 200. It is interesting to speculate on what view Wordsworth, with his suspicion of ‘book-learning’, would have taken of the practice of setting schoolchildren to learn hundreds of lines of poetry.

together' (a possibly intentional echo of Keats). Moreover, poetry gives its readers ideas about 'high and noble principles of action, and [...] inspires the emotions so helpful in making principles operative. Hence its extreme importance to all of us; but in our elementary schools its importance seems to me at present quite extraordinary.'⁷⁹¹ Arnold, believing that the spread of democracy was inevitable, felt that it was the duty of the state to 'civilize' the masses in preparation for such a change. In this, he differed from both Wordsworth, who regarded mass democracy as a harbinger of anarchy (see Chapter two), and from Mill, who, whilst sharing Arnold's views about the value of poetry in education, saw attempts by the State to 'mould' society as leading inexorably to State control. Ironically, given his low opinion of Coleridge as a philosopher, Arnold's view of the purpose of mass education was in fact closest to Coleridge's.

In this report, Arnold revisits the question of which particular poems teachers should use. After stating that the 'choice of passages to be learnt is of the utmost importance', he comments: 'Some years ago it was the fashion to make [children] learn Goldsmith's 'Deserted Village'. Nothing could be more unsuitable [...] and the use of the poem has happily almost ceased.'⁷⁹² Arnold specifies as 'conditions to be insisted upon' that the poetry chosen should have 'real beauties of expression and feeling [...] such as the children's hearts and minds can lay hold of, and a distinct

⁷⁹¹ Arnold, 'General Report for 1880', *Reports on Elementary Schools 1852-1882*, pp. 200-201.

⁷⁹² Arnold, 'General Report for 1880', *Reports on Elementary Schools 1852-1882*, p. 202. Arnold, who comments that the poem had been set for schools following the recommendation of 'the late Lord Lyndhurst', is silent on the reasons for the unsuitability of 'The Deserted Village', but it may be that the poem was simply too long for children to learn.

point or centre of beauty should occur within the passage learnt.'⁷⁹³ By this time, Arnold's opinion of Mrs Hemans' poetry seems to have improved, as he suggests that poems such as her 'The Graves of a Household', 'The Homes of England' and 'The Better Land' are 'to be recommended', as 'they have real merit of expression and sentiment, the merits are such that children can feel, and the centre of interest [...] occurs within the limits of what is learnt.'⁷⁹⁴ These particular poems of Hemans had several other advantages as elementary school texts. They employed simple language and rhyme schemes, expressed unexceptionable, if trite, sentiments, and were written from a conservative, patriotic perspective. 'The Homes of England', for example, describes rural upper- and lower-class houses in idyllic terms ('huts and halls') and implies that the social structure they represent is God-given.⁷⁹⁵ In contrast to his earlier recommendations, in this Report Arnold cautions against the use of extracts from Shakespeare, citing as an example of this the 'judgement scene' from *The Merchant of Venice*, as 'the point of interest is often not reached within the one hundred lines, which is all the children learn.'⁷⁹⁶

⁷⁹³ Arnold, 'General Report for 1880', *Reports on Elementary Schools 1852-1882*, p. 202.

⁷⁹⁴ Arnold, 'General Report for 1880', *Reports on Elementary Schools 1852-1882*, p. 202.

⁷⁹⁵ Of Hemans' many poems, perhaps only 'The Homes of England' and 'Casabianca' are still known to the general reader, and both through parodies. Noel Coward's song 'The Stately Homes of England' from his musical *Operetta* parodied the former, whilst the first line of 'Casabianca', 'The boy stood on the burning deck', has formed the beginning of several comic versions, perhaps the best-known being Spike Milligan's 'The boy stood on the burning deck/Whence all but he had fled - The twit!'

⁷⁹⁶ Arnold, 'General Report for 1880', *Reports on Elementary Schools 1852-1882*, p. 203.

It is necessary to bear in mind when reading these sometimes contradictory extracts from his Reports that Arnold was to a great extent constrained in what he could write. Especially after the 1862 'Revised Code', which brought in payment by results for school grants (a change which, as discussed below, Mill supported, but Arnold opposed), school inspectors had to balance accurate reporting of what they found against the risk of the government reducing funding for under-performing schools, many of which were already struggling with inadequate resources.⁷⁹⁷ Inspectors therefore tended to underplay examples of poor teaching, and to exaggerate children's achievements. Arnold's suggestions for poems may, in part, have reflected the books which schools actually possessed. (Unlike in France, schools in England were not awarded funds specifically for the purchase of books). In the political climate, which increasingly favoured a Utilitarian approach to education, Arnold would have stressed in his Reports the usefulness of poetry in improving vocabulary and training the memory, rather than praising its humanising effect on character, or indeed its intrinsic literary merits.

The Revised Code

The reason for the introduction of the Revised Code was a desire amongst Liberal politicians to see proven value for money in State-funded education. Arnold satirised their Utilitarian viewpoint in 'The Twice-Revised Code': 'The duty of a State in public education is, when clearly defined, to obtain the greatest possible quantity

⁷⁹⁷ Arnold, 'The Twice-Revised Code', *Complete Prose Works* II, 212-243 (pp. 212-13). Arnold saw the Code as (whatever its ostensible purpose) a cynical cost-cutting exercise, writing: 'What the Code will actually *do*, is to reduce considerably the grants at present contributed by the State towards the support of schools for the poor.' He estimated that around forty per cent of the total budget would be cut.

of reading, writing and arithmetic for the greatest number.’⁷⁹⁸ Against this view, Arnold objected that, especially in the poorer areas, it was far more important to improve children’s ‘discipline, civilization, [...] religious and moral training’ than to get them through the compulsory examinations which, under the Revised Code, would determine the level of schools’ grants. In a letter to the *Daily News*, printed under a pseudonym on 25 March 1862, Arnold explained that:

In London, in a school filled with the children [...] of poor weavers of Spitalfields, every child will under the Revised Code be examined by the Inspector. Great numbers of them will fail: so backward are they, so long neglected, so physically feeble. Yet most of the good they get, they get from that school. [...] The grant will sink to nothing, and the school managers will be left to enjoy perfect “liberty of action”.⁷⁹⁹

In the event, Arnold’s pessimism about the effects of the Code was more than justified; in just over five years the elementary schools lost £190,000 in grants, and class sizes increased considerably, as the number of teachers was static from 1860 to 1866, even though pupil numbers increased by 120,000 over the same period.⁸⁰⁰

Mill’s support for the Revised Code was based on his belief that the only way to test children’s progress, and thus the efficiency of schools, was through regular examinations. Moreover, as an incentive to good teaching, Mill believed that teachers’ pay should be based on results. In Mill’s words: “The true principle for the

⁷⁹⁸ Arnold, ‘The Twice-Revised Code’, pp. 214-15.

⁷⁹⁹ Arnold, ‘The “Principle of Examination”’, *Complete Prose Works* II, 244-246 (p. 246). Another vehement opponent of the Code was Derwent Coleridge, at that time Principal of St Mark’s College, Chelsea, the first teacher training college to be established for elementary schoolmasters.

⁸⁰⁰ Frank Smith, p. 270.

remuneration of schoolmaster [...] is that of payment for results. The results of their teaching can, in general, only be tested by examinations, conducted by independent public examiners.’⁸⁰¹ Mill also held that regular examinations would enable the dismissal of incompetent teachers: ‘the greatest security of all, without which no other will permanently avail, is the assured prospect of removal, in case of incompetency proven by experience.’⁸⁰² In an argument still advanced by some politicians today, Mill believed that the better schools would drive out the worse schools through the exercise of parental choice.

Mill remained fundamentally opposed to state funding of education for all but the poorest children; middle-class parents ‘can afford to pay; [...] they have no claim to be relieved from the duty of providing education for their children; and *entire* relief from that obligation on other any ground than inability, appears to me to have a highly demoralizing tendency.’⁸⁰³ (This attitude reflects Wordsworth’s reservations about free education; see Chapter two.) Mill shared Arnold’s concerns about the poor quality of private middle-class schools, which were not subject to Government inspection, criticizing: ‘the wretched incompetency of the great majority of the existing schools for the children of the middle class.’ In support of this view, he cited the evidence of Edward Carleton Tufnell, ‘one of the ablest and most experienced of Her Majesty’s inspectors of schools’ that teachers at pauper schools, dismissed ‘on account of gross ignorance or gross immorality’ and debarred by the Poor Law Board from future employment in pauper schools, generally found

⁸⁰¹ Mill, ‘Educational Endowments’, p. 210.

⁸⁰² Mill, ‘Educational Endowments’, p. 214.

⁸⁰³ Mill, ‘Educational Endowments’, p. 210.

employment 'as ushers in schools for the middle or upper classes.'⁸⁰⁴ Mill's solution to the poor quality of schools for the middle class was, as indicated above, to require all pupils at all schools to be examined regularly to assess the quality of their education.

Arnold's position on educational issues was, in many respects, not far from that of Mill. It is important to bear in mind that both men were Liberals; this was not an argument between a Radical and a Tory. Arnold, like Mill, advocated compulsory education, and was not averse to parents being charged for their children's education, citing the example of Prussia, where education was compulsory, but every school charged a fee, albeit at a low level.⁸⁰⁵ Where Arnold differed from Mill was in wanting the government to adopt a more interventionist approach. For example, Arnold, in a speech to the Ipswich Working Men's College in January 1879, said he wanted the State to establish 'public schools for the middle class', by which he meant 'an establishment of the same kind as we now have for popular education. I mean the provision, by law [...] of a supply of properly guaranteed schools [...] giving secondary education, as it is called, – that fuller and higher instruction [...] at a cost not exceeding a certain rate.'⁸⁰⁶ The quality of education provided by individual schools would, in Arnold's view, be better guaranteed by regular inspections than

⁸⁰⁴ Mill, 'Educational Endowments', pp. 213-14. One is reminded of Paul Pennyfeather in Evelyn Waugh's *Decline and Fall* (1928), sent down from Oxford for indecency, but being found employment at a private school through an educational agency.

⁸⁰⁵ Arnold, 'General Report for 1869', *Reports on Elementary Schools 1852-1882*, pp. 138-39.

⁸⁰⁶ Arnold, "Ecce, Convertimur ad Gentes", *Complete Prose Works* IX, 1-19 (p. 13). As Super points out in his Notes, the title of the talk translates as 'Lo, we turn to the Gentiles', a quotation of St Paul from the Acts of the Apostles referring to his decision to widen the Christian mission beyond the Jews.

through examinations.⁸⁰⁷ The fundamental difference, therefore, was that Mill trusted the market rather than the State to ensure the provision of a good quality of education, whilst Arnold took the opposite view.

There is no evidence that Arnold ever met Mill, and the two do not seem to have corresponded. Arnold had been impressed by *On Liberty*, recommending it to his mother as 'worth reading attentively, being one of the few books that inculcate tolerance in an unalarming and inoffensive way.'⁸⁰⁸ Some ten years later, when he went to see Mill speak in the House of Commons, Arnold was profoundly unimpressed. He wrote to James Spedding in January 1868 of seeing Mill 'spring up in a white heat of passion and scream out his words with almost feminine fury. He has never been very interesting to me, simply because notwithstanding his intellectual powers he has always seemed to me to have so little of the *Sage* about him.'⁸⁰⁹ No doubt Mill's advocacy of the Revised Code and payment by results had done much to lessen Arnold's admiration, but also, alarmed by increasing working-class radicalism, culminating in the Hyde Park riot of 1867, Arnold had moved away from Mill's libertarian views, fearing such a philosophy would eventually lead to

⁸⁰⁷ Private schools were not subjected to the regular inspections required of schools which received State funding. Even today, independent schools have their own 'light touch' inspectorial regime, separate from that of Ofsted.

⁸⁰⁸ Arnold, letter to Mary Penrose Arnold, *Letters of Matthew Arnold* ed. by Cecil Y. Lang (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), I, 468.

⁸⁰⁹ Arnold, Letter to James Spedding, 18 January 1868, in *Letters of Matthew Arnold*, III, 222.

anarchy. It is no coincidence that the title of the second chapter of Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1867-8) is 'Doing As One Likes.'⁸¹⁰

Classical and Commercial Academies

For the majority of middle-class children, for whom a public school education was either unattainable or unaffordable, an alternative was a private or 'classical and commercial' academy. As Mary Wollstonecraft's criticisms of 'common' private schools indicate (see Chapter one), they had a sometimes deserved reputation for providing a poor education. An example of the worst type was depicted by Dickens in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39) as a hellhole where unwanted children could be dumped by their parents or guardians, and be subjected to physical abuse, a poor diet, and little or no education. Dickens' fictional Dotheboys Hall was based on two schools in Yorkshire he had visited as a journalist, but his poor opinion of such institutions also drew upon his own experiences as a child at a commercial academy in London. In his article 'Our School', published in *Household Words* on 11 October 1851, Dickens describes a school dominated by an ignorant, sadistic 'Chief', with most of the teaching being undertaken by a downtrodden 'Usher'. Dickens concludes the article with a couplet from Book VII of Wordsworth's *The Excursion*: 'So fades and languishes, goes dim and dies/All that the world is proud of.' The lines are used ironically, as the school, demolished as part of a railway construction scheme, was an institution whose passing Dickens celebrated rather than mourned; in Dickens' words 'And is not proud of, too. It had little reason to be proud of Our School, and

⁸¹⁰ Arnold, 'Culture and Anarchy', *Complete Prose Works: V, Culture and Anarchy: with Friendship's Garland and some literary essays*, ed. by R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965), pp. 115-136.

has done much better since in that way, and will do better yet.’⁸¹¹ That school provided the model for Mr Creakle’s ‘Salem House’ in *David Copperfield* (1850), and Arnold cites it in an 1880 article entitled ‘The Incompatibles’, claiming, on the basis of reports of ‘young Germans, trained in their own German schools’ who have later ‘served as teachers of foreign languages [...] in the ordinary private schools for the middle class in England’, that ‘establishments like Salem House and principals like Mr Creakle’ were still prevalent.⁸¹² As George Gissing points out, whatever Dickens’ views may have been about the value of education, two of his most insufferable child characters are schoolboys; ‘Rob the Grinder’ in *Dombey and Son* (1848), the product of a charity school who proves to be a ‘very troublesome young rascal’, and the obnoxious Charley Hexham in *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), the prototype of what Gissing terms ‘the less happy results of the board-school system.’⁸¹³

However, many commercial academies provided a good education at a reasonable cost. If they lacked the cachet and social connections provided by a public school, they taught a wider variety of subjects. In particular, they, like the Dissenting Academies, offered teaching in ‘useful’ subjects, rather than focusing, as the public and grammar schools did, on the Classics. As mentioned in Chapter one, Humphry Repton’s father had removed him from Norwich Grammar School because of its narrow classical curriculum and as the nineteenth century progressed, subjects with practical value became increasingly important. In part, at least, this was because the

⁸¹¹ Dickens, ‘Our School’, in *Gone Astray and Other Essays from Household Words* ed. by Michael Sadler (London: J. M. Dent, 1998), p. 42.

⁸¹² Arnold, ‘The Incompatibles’, *Complete Prose Works* IX, 238-285 (pp. 273-75).

⁸¹³ George Gissing, *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* (London: Blackie and Sons, 1898), pp. 207-14.

system of patronage for posts in the Army and Civil Service was giving way to appointment via examination, and progression on merit, a change enthusiastically supported by Mill. Examinations for entry to the Indian Civil Service were introduced in 1838, for parts of the Home Civil Service in 1855, and for Army officers in 1857.⁸¹⁴

The commercial academies drew particularly hostile attention from Arnold, firstly because he saw them as contributing to what he termed the 'Philistinism' of the English middle class by promoting entirely materialistic values, and secondly, because the academies were not subject to any form of inspection, there was no independent assessment of the value of the education they provided. Geoffrey Best provides a useful account of the way in which various types of schools were inspected.⁸¹⁵ As Best puts it, for non-inspected schools: 'it was [...] a crime physically to maim or kill a schoolboy or schoolgirl [...] and that was the only legal protection schoolchildren had against the ignorance, folly or cruelty of their elders.'⁸¹⁶

In *A French Eton*, Arnold mockingly quotes several of the grandiose claims made by some academies from the advertisements in *The Times*, such as one which offers to provide an 'Educational Home' where 'discipline is based upon moral influence and emulation, and every effort is made to combine home-comforts with

⁸¹⁴ As discussed in Chapter two, Wordsworth's appointment as Distributor of Stamps for Westmoreland in 1813 came from patronage, and he in turn secured a post for his son Willy as Sub-distributor of Stamps for Carlisle in 1843. His elder son John was found a living as a clergyman through patronage.

⁸¹⁵ Geoffrey Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain 1851-75* (London: Fontana Press, 1979), pp. 170-75.

⁸¹⁶ Geoffrey Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain 1851-75*, p. 172.

school-training.’⁸¹⁷ Arnold, directly contradicting Mill, suggests that to rely on ‘supply and demand’ for the provision of good schools is fundamentally misguided, because ‘the mass of mankind do not [...] know what distinguishes good teaching and training from bad; they do not know what they ought to demand, and, therefore, the demand cannot be relied on to give us the right supply.’⁸¹⁸

Although private schools were not subject to inspection by HM Inspectors, evidence from other sources suggests that the worst were indeed very bad. An 1834 report by the Manchester Statistical Society revealed that, in the majority of the schools they visited, the lack of order, the poor qualifications of the masters, the large number of scholars and the absence of any plan of instruction meant that they were ‘nearly inefficient for any real purpose of education.’⁸¹⁹ Some thirty years later, the report of the Newcastle Commission on Education (1861) suggested there had been little improvement; one private school, with 130 children on its register, was housed in two rooms of about fifteen square feet, with ‘no ventilation and not much light’. The Report was scathing about the quality of teachers, particularly in London. In the words of the Report: ‘None are too old, too poor, too ignorant, too feeble, too unqualified in one or every way, to regard themselves, and to be regarded by others, as unfit for school-keeping’. The keepers of such schools included ‘men and women of seventy, or even eighty, persons who spell badly, [...] who can scarcely write, and who cannot cipher at all.’⁸²⁰

⁸¹⁷ Arnold, ‘A French Eton’, p. 281.

⁸¹⁸ Arnold, ‘A French Eton’, p. 282.

⁸¹⁹ Cited in Frank Smith, p. 151.

⁸²⁰ *Newcastle Commission Report*, Vol I, pp. 92-93, cited in Frank Smith, pp. 246-47.

Arnold's criticisms of the range of subjects taught at commercial academies also echo the objections raised by Wordsworth, Coleridge, De Quincey and Mill (and to some extent, Hazlitt) about the danger of teaching only 'useful' subjects instead of instilling in children a love of knowledge for its own sake, and teaching them how to think and reason. Arnold clearly placed a higher value on the Classics and English literature than he did on science and mathematics. There is, for example, a telling section in Arnold's report of an inspection of Borough Road and Stockwell Colleges, where he states that 'instruction civilises a raw nature only so far as it delights and enkindles it', adding that 'no refining influence is more powerful than that of literary culture; but this influence seems to need in the recipient a certain refinement of nature at the outset [...] and with this previous refinement [...] physical science appear[s] able to dispense.'⁸²¹ This links to Mill's idea, mentioned above, that only certain people are fully 'capable of feeling the sublime order of natural beauty'. The conflicting claims of the humanities and the sciences were continually debated throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, exemplified in C. P. Snow's 1959 Rede Lecture 'The Two Cultures'.

Conclusion

In the 1860s both Mill and Arnold, as Liberal educational reformers, faced essentially the same challenge as that which had confronted Coleridge and Wordsworth some half-century before: how could mass elementary education be implemented in a way which avoided 'cramming' children and denying their individuality? As indicated in Chapters two and three, both Coleridge and Wordsworth, after their initial enthusiastic support for Bell's monitorial system,

⁸²¹ Arnold, *Reports on Elementary Schools 1852-1882*, pp. 250-51.

eventually came to reject all 'schemes of education' as being dehumanizing, and this, from the outset, was also Mill's view.

Mill's preference was for a mixed, market-driven system, where parental choice would direct the type of education provided, thus avoiding State conditioning and control of individuals, and encouraging diversity of provision. The effect of the Revised Code, however, was to make education more mechanical, and less imaginative. To get children through the examinations, teachers would make them memorize the relevant information, without testing their understanding of it. The focus on examinations to the exclusion of everything else also meant that schools were unwilling or unable to provide anything beyond the three Rs. As a report from the Education Department put it: 'a child at an elementary school [...] knows little or nothing of the history of his own country [...] is ignorant of the political constitution under which he lives, or the laws by which he is surrounded, and is incapable of expressing in terms anything approaching to accuracy [...] any minimum of knowledge he might possess.'⁸²² In Frank Smith's summary, 'memorizing, repeating, passively listening, were the main requirements of the system'; children were not expected to engage in discussion, still less to question their teachers about what they were being taught.⁸²³ Mill's support for the Code had thus ironically helped to ensure that, especially for the children of the poor, education was based even more on 'cram' than it had been under the Bell/Lancaster systems. Progress in such a system was, essentially, dependent on precisely the sort of mechanical memory that Mill consistently decried.

⁸²² *Report of Education Department, 1875-6*, p. 366, quoted in Frank Smith, p. 306.

⁸²³ Frank Smith, p. 307.

Arnold, as discussed above, was sceptical about the operation of the market in education. He robustly countered the warnings of Mill and others about state control of education, stating in 1864: 'People talk of Government *interference*, Government *control*, as if State-action were necessarily something imposed upon them from without; something despotic which [...] left no freedom to their activity. Can anyone really suppose that, in a country like this, State-action – in education, for instance – can ever be that, unless we choose to make it so? We can make [the State] our agent, not our master.'⁸²⁴ His arguments, and those of like-minded contemporaries such as Derwent Coleridge, failed to prevent the introduction of the Revised Code which, with some amendments, remained in force until 1897.

Not content with merely lamenting the unsatisfactory nature of reading-books in schools, however, Arnold set about rectifying matters to some extent by compiling and editing selections from major authors, including Wordsworth, for the 'Golden Treasury' series of poetry anthologies. The books, although controversial with scholars because of Arnold's cavalier editorial methods, were hugely popular both with schools and the general public, as they were inexpensive, but attractively produced. The books went through many editions, and were still in use in the early 1960s.⁸²⁵

⁸²⁴ Arnold, 'A French Eton', p. 309.

⁸²⁵ See Gottfried, pp. 72-74. As Gottfried points out, Arnold mainly ignored Wordsworth's later revisions to some of his poems, and occasionally combined stanzas from different versions of the same poems without indicating where he had done so. Arnold made clear in his Preface to the collection that he had intended to produce a popular rather than a scholarly edition of Wordsworth's poems.

Conclusion

Returning to the questions I posed at the beginning of this thesis, firstly, to what extent were these writers' ideas about education influenced by their own educational experiences, compared to their reaction to contemporary theories? Previous studies have focused on the influence of theorists such as Comenius, Rousseau and Andrew Bell, but it is clear that the personal experiences of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hazlitt and De Quincey at school and university were at least as important. For Wordsworth, although his experiences at Hawkshead Grammar School were essentially positive, his time at Cambridge gave him a deep dislike and distrust of all forms of competition and what he termed 'emulation' in education. Bell's system, by focusing on cooperation rather than competition, seemed a good way of avoiding such dangers, and would also allow the level of teaching to be matched to the ability of each individual child. For the latter reason, Wordsworth sought to have his elder son John, who was a willing but slow learner, educated at Charterhouse, at that time run on Bell's system. The school's refusal to admit John was probably one factor in Wordsworth's eventual disillusion with the system.

Coleridge's enthusiastic response to Bell's ideas can be explained as being mainly a reaction to what Coleridge saw as the chief drawbacks of the system of teaching in place at Christ's Hospital School (a narrow curriculum; too much 'empty' time; favouritism by teachers towards some pupils and victimisation of others). Coleridge saw Bell's system as overcoming all these disadvantages, whilst simultaneously offering the chance of providing education for large numbers of children at a relatively low cost. More generally, Coleridge always placed more value on formal education than Wordsworth, who was consistently sceptical about 'book learning'.

In contrast to Wordsworth and Coleridge, De Quincey's enthusiasm for Bell's system was based on a degree of personal experience. At Manchester Grammar School, as under Bell's system, the day-to-day running of the school was devolved in large part to the older boys, and again as in Bell's system, all forms of both corporal and 'shaming' punishments had been abolished. De Quincey saw the main disadvantages of his education at Manchester Grammar School as being attributable to the character of the Headmaster, and he believed that Bell's system could overcome this weakness, operating equally well regardless of any individual teacher's abilities.

Hazlitt's opposition to all types of educational reform, meanwhile, can perhaps be ascribed in part to his dissatisfaction with the education he had received at Hackney New College, a progressive institution by contemporary standards. Whilst aware of the potential dangers of a traditional, Classical education, such as pedantry and narrow-minded scholarship remote from real-world concerns, Hazlitt retained a sentimental attachment to the idea of a Classical education at what he termed an 'old established place' in preference to 'new-fangled experiments or modern seminaries'. It was the type of school to which he would have sent his son William if the choice had been his to make.

This is not to deny Richardson's thesis that these writers' support for, or opposition to, certain 'systems of education' was also partly due to political and religious concerns. The moral panic of the later eighteenth century about an uneducated mob overthrowing existing social structures and bringing about anarchy, which was escalated by the French Revolution and ensuing Terror, was still of serious concern to Matthew Arnold as late as 1867. Education of the 'lower orders'

was seen as a vital weapon in countering unrest, partly by taking young people off the streets, and partly by, in Coleridge's phrase, 'imposing virtuous habits.' In addition, Bell's system, linked as it was to the Established church, had an inherently moral dimension, in contrast to the 'Godless' system of Joseph Lancaster. Hazlitt's opposition to both systems, meanwhile, can be seen as reflecting his suspicion that they would amount to a means of indoctrination and State control. However, his position on working-class education, in response to Samuel Whitbread's proposal for a system of voluntary, free, State-funded education; 'let them alone', could be described in the same way as Tom Duggett describes Wordsworth's eventual anti-system position: 'as theoretically liberating in direct proportion as it is practically exclusionary and elitist'.

Secondly, what choices did these writers make in their own children's education? Wordsworth did his best to ensure that his two surviving sons were educated under Andrew Bell's monitorial system, though without much success. Although he often protested against the idea of sending young girls away to school, his own daughter Dora was sent to boarding schools from the age of five, mainly because she was seen as unruly and difficult to manage. In the cases of both Coleridge and Hazlitt, the breakdown of their marriages meant that their influence on their children's education was limited. In Coleridge's case, this was exacerbated by his neglect of his children after Southey took them into his care. Hazlitt's preference for an 'old established' school such as Charterhouse for his son came to nothing, as his first wife and her mother took over responsibility for the boy's education. De Quincey, for reasons of poverty, seems to have had only limited influence over his sons' education, though all of them did relatively well in 'worldly' terms. His daughters were essentially self-taught.

Thirdly, what influence did these writers have on educational practices? The main influence of Wordsworth and Coleridge in their own time was in their advocacy of Andrew Bell's monitorial system. It is difficult to say precisely how great their influence was, but their voices, allied to those of powerful conservative champions such as Sara Trimmer and Hannah More, and key figures in the Church of England gave a degree of intellectual respectability to Bell's system which it might otherwise have lacked. Hazlitt's anti-education stance seems to have had little influence in his own time, as radicals increasingly saw education as key to social change. De Quincey's rear-guard struggle against compulsory education was equally unsuccessful, and his dire warnings against the dangers of mass literacy remained unfulfilled. Ironically, the ultra-conservative De Quincey's unfavourable view of State-funded, compulsory mass education was not far removed from that of the radical Hazlitt. Both believed that the choice of how, or indeed whether children should be educated must be entirely one for parents. Both also believed that mass education was being offered as a distraction from real societal problems such as low wages and rising prices.

Finally, what role did these writers see for literature in education? All had a preference for the 'humane' disciplines, in particular for Classical literature, above mathematics and science, especially applied science. They saw the value of literature as being two-fold. Firstly, studying Classical literature exercised the mind. Many writers on education, from Locke onwards, had argued that teaching children how to think was more important than the specific knowledge they gained through education. Several argued that studying the Classics was an effective means of developing such logical thinking, but there was general agreement that the way in which the Classics were actually taught resulted only in, as De Quincey's put it, a

‘disgust for literature and knowledge’. Of the writers I discuss, although both Coleridge and De Quincey intended to produce ‘ideal’ curriculums, neither developed anything resembling a coherent plan, and De Quincey’s abortive attempts at teaching John Wordsworth and his own son William demonstrated that it was easier to theorize about education than to teach effectively.

In the view of all the writers I discuss, imaginative fiction and poetry gave children the ability to grasp abstract concepts, and, by raising them above mundane concerns, enabled them to ‘forget themselves’. Hazlitt was occasionally sceptical about the value of studying the Classics, identifying the risk of narrow pedantry from an exclusively Classical education. However, Hazlitt was just as vociferous as more conservative writers such as De Quincey in condemning ‘useful’ subjects as being somehow of less value than true learning, which he termed the ‘fine pabulum of useful enthusiasm’.

The teaching of literature in schools raises a fundamental conundrum. If, as De Quincey claimed, literature can teach us nothing, why should it be taught in schools? Even if it needed to be taught because of its ‘humanizing’ influence, how could pupils’ progress in the subject be examined? As became apparent following the introduction of ‘payment by results’, the only way elementary schoolchildren were in fact examined in the subject was by repeating, parrot-fashion, a piece of poetry or prose. Arnold could at least see some practical use in learning poetry ‘by heart’; it widened children’s vocabulary, and he saw rote learning as a useful tool in developing memory, but it is likely that Coleridge, Wordsworth, and De Quincey would have dismissed these claimed advantages as being both banal and missing the whole point of education.

One conclusion that could be drawn from the involvement of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and later Mill in educational controversies is that, however well intentioned, the effects of their interventions were both deleterious and the opposite of what they had intended. In the case of Wordsworth and Coleridge, the adverse effects were twofold. Firstly, the monitorial system they advocated, however sound in principle, resulted in an increase in mechanical rote learning. Secondly, their sectarian support for Andrew Bell and their corresponding opposition to Joseph Lancaster, helped to ensure that education remained divided on religious grounds, and thus delayed the introduction of a truly universal system of mass education by several decades. Against this, the monitorial system provided education of a sort for large numbers of children who might otherwise have remained uneducated. More importantly, perhaps, even the minimal grants provided by the government for the two systems established a precedent for State-funded education.

Mill's libertarian beliefs led him to oppose universal State provision of education, and he held that the State, whilst legally requiring that children be educated, should only provide such education in cases of extreme need. The outcomes of competing systems of education would then be determined by regular examinations, with funding for each school being dependent upon results. The expectation, or hope, was that 'good' schools would drive 'bad' schools out of the market. The drawback with such a system, as Matthew Arnold predicted, was that it caused schools to fall back on the very systems of rote-learning to which Mill was, in principle, opposed. The system, moreover, resulted in schools in the poorest areas losing funding, as they could not compete on equal terms with schools in more affluent districts.

It is striking how many of the debates and controversies explored in this thesis resound today. Mill's argument for a market-based educational system in which parents are free to choose what type of education their children should receive is periodically revived, and the related issue of how progress should be tested, and how often, continues to divide opinion. The attackers and defenders of 'humane' as opposed to vocational education still argue over the fundamental questions of what education is, and what education is for.

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